

Wright, David (2004) Work, consumption and the self in the UK retail book trade. PhD thesis, University of Nottingham.

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**'Work, Consumption and the Self in the UK Retail
Book Trade'**

by David Wright BA, MA

**Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, April 2004**



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Abstract

This thesis uses the empirical setting of the UK retail book trade to critically assess sociological accounts of work and consumption and their relationship to the self. Drawing on talk with bookshop workers, representations of the book-trade and the trade press, it examines the ways in which the book-trade is historically constructed, both as a market for symbolic goods and as a distinctive type of workplace. This distinctiveness is put to use by both firms and workers in the organisation of production and in the construction of occupational identities. Its roots, though, are in the historical construction of the idea of the self, drawn from romanticism, and a view of *culture* as related to notions of self-development. A key element of the romantic self (Campbell 1983, 1987) is its critical distance from the market and from processes of commodity exchange. As such, the creation and distribution of cultural material is rhetorically removed from broader processes of production and consumption. In the context of the book trade this generates tensions between cultural and commercial imperatives which feed into employment relationships. Books and reading are also examined as particular types of objects and activity that have been discursively associated with the development the self. These associations allow for particular orientations to work in the retail book industry which problematise accounts of the self as diminished or colonised in the context of the retail or service environment. Whilst accounts of the contemporary workplace emphasise the extent to which the 'selves' of workers are shaped by managerial initiatives, the example of the retail book trade suggests that worker conceptions of the self allow for critical distance from aspects of the employment relationship and for the aesthetic appreciation of work experiences. Rather than exemplifying the reflexive self of late-modernity, this thesis also argues that this bookselling self is also embedded in relationships of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984, 1996).

Acknowledgements

Humble thanks to Dr. Alan Aldridge and Dr. Tim Strangleman for their wisdom and enthusiasm. Thanks to Becky, Matt, Nick and other inhabitants of B21 - as mutually supportive an environment as a scholar could wish for. Special thanks to mum and dad for their love, support and lap-top and to Alison for keeping me relatively sane. Finally thanks to all my respondents for their time and insight.

Introduction

“Mrs Penn laid the Forsyte Saga on the table and turned upon Gordon. She was always very affable towards Gordon. She addressed him as Mr. Comstock, shopwalker though he was, and held literary conversations with him. There was the freemasonry of highbrows between them.”

Keep the Aspidistra Flying, George Orwell (1936: 15)

In the summer of 2003 the book industry was headline news. The publication of the fifth title in the popular series of books by children's author JK Rowling, concerning the adventures of the wizard Harry Potter, drew the kind of blanket media coverage normally reserved for the launch of a big-budget Hollywood blockbuster or an international sports tournament. News bulletins showed children queuing at midnight, at large bookshops in major cities, to be the first to own and read this new treasure, whilst the logistical operation to distribute millions of books to various locations in the country was presented as military in its precision. Speaking on Channel4 News on the day of the launch a marketing director from the internet bookseller Amazon described ‘the biggest consumer event in history’. Radio phone-ins and late night discussion programmes discussed the merits of this book and the wider ‘Harry Potter Phenomenon’.

Some intriguing tensions emerged in these discussions. A general air of celebration surrounds Harry Potter, based upon the presumed ability of these books to make *reading* a popular pursuit amongst children whatever their age, race or gender (though encouraging reading amongst boys is cited as a particularly positive characteristic). At the same time, though, the extreme popularity of one author and one type of book is interpreted as having a potentially detrimental effect on the state of the literary economy, preventing the enriching variety of a vibrant and creative flow of new books and new authors. Linked to this is an emergent suspicion of the perception of rampant commercialism polluting the otherwise gentle industry of book production. Intriguingly an interview conducted by Jeremy Paxman with the author of the Harry Potter series focussed in part on the success of

film series made from the books and the related merchandising and toys. The interviewer was disparaging whilst the author was apologetic about some of the 'junk' produced with Harry Potter's name (or more specifically his trademark, copyrighted by the entertainment multi-national Time Warner) on it. It is good that children are reading, one might conclude from discourses surrounding Harry Potter, but, much like the risk of the marijuana user turning to heroin, not if this consumerism-lite leads to the excessive consumption of mass produced *junk*.

These two themes – the place of the products of a literary economy in a broader cultural economy and the separation of the act of buying books from other types of buying and selling - recur within the book trade. The 'commoditiness' of books, i.e. their existence as products to be bought and sold like any other is obscured by their existence as particular types of commodities which lend themselves to particular types of relationships which are not simply quantifiable. As such they are perhaps the ideal, definitive, commodity for a consumer society in which the exchange of symbolic things has apparently become a central means of leisure and recreation and a central route to the formation of the contemporary self. Despite this, and despite the jarring assertion of the marketing executive from Amazon cited above, books and consumerism do not go hand in hand. Instead, books are also readily cited as a refuge *from* the junk of consumerism, rather than as consumer products themselves, even within the book trade. In researching this thesis, for example, I attended the annual conference of The Bookseller's Association, the major industry wide organisation for publishers and retailers. One of the sessions, entitled 'Growing the Book Market' began with the assertion that in the previous twelve months only 44% of the population had bought a book. In the context of the session this was interpreted as a worrying indicator to inspire action within commercial organisations. The implication was that this figure meant that books were somehow a minority pursuit (if a sizeable minority) and that the modern U.K was less receptive to books as things in the modern global information economy. Through the course of the presentations though, it was revealed that this figure excluded certain

types of books (such as technical manuals and some gardening books) and that if these were included the figure was a far healthier 75%. The implication is that people are buying books but they are not buying the right books. This is an intriguing tension for this study.

The commoditiness of books does not lead to a simplistic urge to sell more books in an unproblematic 'pile 'em high' supermarket style. There appears to be a parallel concern to sell the right types of books to the right types of people and to sell them in the right type of way, inspired by processes of classification and distinction. Harry Potter may attract children into bookshops but he may also attract them into supermarkets or onto websites. These are potentially less enriching places, in the discourse of the retail book trade. This thesis also examines the extent to which these types of discourse in the book industry are informed by historically and socially constructed ideas of what books are and their place in what we might term the *cultural economy* or the *market place of ideas*. Both these metaphors implicate books as understood through the lens of economic logic whereas there are powerful constructions of them as precisely separate from this, representing opposition to consumerism as much as objects to be consumed.

Books and reading, then, can be understood as both complicit in and critical of the development of consumer society. Some of the critical reaction to the launch of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* connect the reading of books with notions of personal development and with ideas of personal authenticity which, in part, are derived from ambivalence to the commercial. Columnist David Aaronovitch argues

“There is a bit of elitism here, I suppose. But when this level of marketing is applied to book then it becomes impossible to distinguish between artistic considerations and financial ones.” (Aaronovitch 22/6/03)

The implication here is that financial considerations, marketing, commerce inevitably pollutes the purer, authentic experience of art. Art and culture

are precisely the opposite of commerce. The negotiation of this tension within the employment relationships of organisations dedicated to the production and selling of books as commodities is the central narrative of this thesis.

This approach is focussed upon a specific empirical examination of the contemporary retail book industry and in particular the employment relationships within the bookshop. Tensions around the status of books as both cultural and commercial objects are examined through looking at the retail book trade as a workplace. In doing this the book industry is constructed as not just a generator of symbolic objects but also a place in which economic relationships are privileged but also negotiated. In the past twenty years the U.K book trade, like other comparable culture industries, has experienced something of a transformation. The narratives of change which go alongside these transformations are complex and contradictory, as this thesis will examine, but there can be little argument that the ways in which books are produced and traded in the early twenty-first century differs in quite fundamental ways from the ways experienced a quarter of a century ago. The rise of the internet bookshop (arguably the driving force behind all types of internet shopping) initially threatened to have serious consequences for traditional bookshop, particularly through the infinite range on offer in cyberspace. The rise of the chains threatened to squeeze out the independent bookshop, with all the contradictory discourses about the nature of contemporary capitalism that the ideas of the small, local shop serving a community evokes (Miller 1999). The ability of large chain retailers and internet sellers to offer large discounts on newly published best selling titles (of which Harry Potter is only the most recent example) reduces the ability of independent bookshops to be competitive on price. Discounting best selling books was described by one independent bookshop manager speaking at a trade conference as, “turning our Rolls Royces into Minis.”¹ An editorial in the trade magazine

¹ Christine Hanson, manager of a bookshop in Spalding Lincolnshire in presentation to the ‘Recruitment and Retention of Staff’ session at the 2002 Bookseller’s Association conference held in Brighton. The presentation was entitled ‘The Power and Value of a Book’.

The Bookseller suggested this practice may have increased sales, “but it has also created confusion about the true value of books.” (quoted in Howitt 2000:43)

The end of the Net Book Agreement between publishers and booksellers about recommended retail prices threatened to rob books of their elevated position amongst commodities. This, together with conglomeration within the media and publishing sector, imposing rigorous economic constraints on what could and could not be published, threatened the culturally enriching range of publications in bookshops and squeezed the profitability of many. The complex impact of these various changes, perceived or real, has left the U.K book trade in the following state.

Retail book chains, including chain stationers, made up 40% of the retail sector market share in 2000. The largest specialist chain, by far, was Waterstone's (part of the HMV group) with over 216 outlets and year-end sales 1998-9 of £404 million (The next biggest chain was Ottakar's with 74 branches and £73 million sales). Independents made up 17% of the retail sector market share, book clubs 10.2%, the internet 5%, the 'bargain bookshop' 6.4% and supermarkets 7.4%. ²The chains, then, represent the largest source of books (though specialist chains that sell solely books and mixed chains such as WH Smith which also sell stationery have equivalent levels of sales volume) and the independent sector has suffered something of a decline, particularly since the end of the Net Book Agreement. *The Guardian* reported in March 2001 that the number of independent shops had fallen from 1,894 to 1,699 since 1995. (Engel 2001) In place of the independents the U.K has seen the rise of the large city-centre or out of town book superstore, complete with coffee shop and comfortable furniture in which customers are encouraged to browse, to read and to spend time. A director of a firm referred to these to me as 'lifestyle stores'.³

² These figures are taken from *The Book Sales Yearbooks 2001*, Bookseller Publications.

³ Interview 14/2/01

Whilst there may be an easy critical narrative of such changes as bad corporate capital polluting yet another form of contemporary life, the complexities of the discourses of the book trade make this narrative problematic, as this thesis will show. Crucially, the image of the independent bookshop and the discursive associations of the notion of 'independence' as 'anti-corporate', or at least reluctantly corporate, survive in the retail chains. The employment relationship and the place of the feeling and value of books within the bookshop as a workplace demonstrate this. The average remuneration per employee in book chains is approximately £10, 000⁴ in a broader economy in which the median average wage is estimated at £22,269⁵. Those who work within the multi-million pound industry that brings us Harry Potter are similarly implicated in the completing discourses over the value of books, not least because their reward may be measured in terms of aesthetic or cultural capital as much and as well as financial. Much as the consumption of books is implicated in, but discursively separate from, consumerism (a kind of 'not quite consumerism') so in the construction of the contemporary cultural industries, work is 'not quite work'. It is informed by notions which separate it from more mundane (more concretely or simplistically *industrial*) relationships of more apparently typical workplaces and by the possibility of creativity and self-expression.

Work in retail may not easily fit with these constructions but, this thesis argues, the symbolic resonance of the production of cultural objects feeds into the experience of work in a bookshop. Books, their production, distribution and consumption, have long been a battleground for the kinds of intense ideological struggles that lie at the heart of the Enlightenment project, linked with notions of rationality, education, knowledge, freedom and citizenship. Whilst it is clearly beyond the scope of this thesis to do justice to such grand debates they provide a background to a more mundane inquiry. What do 'books' mean to those who work with them,

⁴ This figure is taken from Howitt 2000.

⁵ Median gross annual earnings for non-manual workers, New Earnings Survey 2002, ONS.

where does this meaning come from and how does it inform work with 'books'? By examining the book trade, and more specifically the bookshop, as a workplace this thesis re-emphasises the relationships of employment and production in cultural production and elaborates on how both the processes of work in this industry and the processes of consumption of its products are informed by broader historical and sociological processes.

Chapters One and Two begin the process of setting the broader theoretical context for this discussion. They outline two separate sets of sociological and theoretical literature concerning production and consumption. Chapter One outlines some sociological approaches to the workplace in general, before focussing upon contemporary debates about the place of the self in employment relationships and recent sociological debates about the place of the self in work. This is to introduce the contemporary social scientific narrative of shift from production to consumption in understanding and defining social position and the self. These theoretical themes are developed in Chapter Two, which focuses on some sociological understandings of consumerism and consumption. This chapter develops the critique of the narrative of change and implicates consumption as part of similar processes of self-discipline as the workplace. Importantly this chapter also explores sociological understanding of the possibility of the self as constructed through symbolic things. The importance of the 'romantic ethic' in understanding the development of the consuming self is introduced, as is the place of consumption in constructing group identities based on issues of distinction and cultural capital. These draw on the work of Colin Campbell (1983, 1987) and Pierre Bourdieu in particular (1984).

Chapter Three explains how these theoretical themes have been operationalised into an empirical project. It also justifies the selection of the particular field of study and outlines the particular methodological approaches taken as well as giving an account of the processes of access negotiation, the design of the research questions and the analysis of the

data that these generated. Chapter Four begins the analysis of the book trade by focussing on the representations and perceptions of books as particular types of commodities, sold by particular types of people, in particular types of place. It also examines the historical emergence of the kind of tensions most recently felt in the context of the commercial success of Harry Potter by looking at the ways in which both the figure of the writer and the material object of the book have been represented. This chapter develops the notion of 'aura' drawn from the work of Walter Benjamin (1999) and elaborated on, in the context of work in the culture industries, by Lash and Urry (1994). It argues that this concept is useful in understanding the elevation of books as particular types of objects and particular types of commodities which feed into the processes of construction of occupational identities in the book trade generally and in the bookshop in particular.

Chapter Five focuses on the meanings attached to the consumption of books which implicate them as objects which have been both rhetorically exemplars of the symbolic objects through which it is possible to construct an authentic self and also complicit in the perpetuation of social distinctions based upon inequalities in distribution of cultural capital. This chapter also examines the ways in which the book trade and retail bookshop workers talk about their consumers. Chapter Six focuses on the processes of production within the book trade and examines the historically specific organisation of these processes. It makes use of Howard Becker's notion of the Art World (Becker 1982) in examining the complex processes in the production of 'culture' by the culture industries that extend beyond the moment of artistic creation. It also draws importantly on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1996) in examining the field of culture in relation to the economic field, which allows for the construction of a particular kind of gentle capitalism in the realm of the cultural or the literary. The construction of books as a different kind of commodity is examined through talk with bookshop workers about processes of change, including the use of technology and the end of the Net Book Agreement. Finally Chapter Seven examines the book trade as a type of retail.

Contemporary trends in retail concern the role of the self in work and the idea of subjectivity as a resource upon which managerial techniques are presumed to operate. The tensions in this managerially defined working self in an industry in which notions of authenticity are so powerfully embedded in the products being sold will be examined. This concluding chapter re-connects with the theoretical narrative of the changing relationship between production and consumption by stressing the symbolic role of the things that people sell in their view of their experience of the workplace. This symbolism and by extension the sources of the meanings it generates are too diffuse and complex to be contained in a managerially defined culture of the workplace.

This thesis examines narratives, representations and perceptions of work, consumption and the book trade, which are also embedded within the researcher. The narrative of shift from work to consumption as organising institutions of the contemporary self is a powerful one in contemporary sociology, which has spilled out into the language of marketing, advertising and lifestyle television programmes to become a kind of common-sensical understanding of our position in the world. By shifting the focus onto 'the self' as a historically constituted idea, this thesis attempts to question some of the assumptions upon which this shift is based and understood, not least the idea that work is somehow no longer 'meaningful'. My own experience as a bookshop worker led me to question the validity of this premise. Talk with the respondents involved in this study confirmed the view that workers in this industry are generally engaged and enthusiastic for their work, despite the frustrations and lack of material reward it offers. Whilst these personal experiences have been largely kept out of the formal research design of this thesis it is unavoidable that these, and indeed more general experiences of books and reading that reflect my own cultural capital, have informed my understanding of this field. I found bookshop work to be largely highly enjoyable, certainly in comparison to other jobs of similar financial reward I had previously and subsequently held. The reason for this enjoyment and the possibility of this kind of

experience of the workplace, constructed as an aesthetic appreciation, will be explored in the subsequent chapters.

In *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu describes the educated workers who flooded the culture industries of nineteenth century France as a 'proletaroid intelligentsia' who, unable to gain the limited number of positions in the developing commercial and bureaucratic order settled for the possibility of "earning a living, albeit a miserable one" in positions with "every prestige of romantic triumph", associated with, "small jobs linked to industrial literature." (Bourdieu 1996: 55) This idea of romantic triumph over the mundanities of contemporary service work as a compensation for low material reward amongst highly educated workers is evident in the contemporary construction of the bookselling self. As well as celebrating the possibility of this triumph this thesis also critically assesses the extent to which it is embedded in processes of social and cultural distinction.

Chapter 1 Producing Selves

The aim of this thesis is to examine work in the contemporary U.K retail book trade in the context of recent and historical sociological accounts of the workplace. In particular, it will examine the utility of work in this sector as a means for producing or constructing coherent identities or selves among workers and the tensions that emerge in the employment relationships of large organisations, dedicated to the sale of objects of symbolic importance. This approach places this work in a recent tradition of sociological inquiry of the service workplace, which has attempted to assess the impact of service encounters on the processes of self-production, with particular emphasis on the effect of the manipulation of the self in the cause of commercial operations. It is also located within a more established tradition of industrial sociology that looks specifically at relationships within the workplace. The more recent tradition, that might be termed a cultural turn within the sociology of work and employment, has grown alongside, and also attempted to make problematic, an emergent narrative tension in contemporary sociology that reassesses the importance of *work* as a resource for the construction of the post or late modern self that accompanies the rise of consumer society. Simplistically expressed this narrative suggests that contemporary subjects are no longer defined, or define themselves, exclusively in relation to their place in processes of production (i.e. within *work*). Instead the processes of consumption and the symbolic possibilities of the contemporary experiences of consumer society allow for a more fluid, though arguably a more fragile, self to emerge. As a result, investment of selves in work has diminished and the realm of leisure has become the central site of self-production in late modernity. This reflects a shift, outlined by Lash and Urry (1987), as from organised to disorganised capitalism. In the contemporary context, characterised by flexible labour markets as well as apparent erosion of the assumed stabilities of other institutions such as the family or the nation, resources for the making of the self are more ephemeral and sources for

judging the experience of the self are more psychically than structurally derived. The aim of this chapter is to chart this narrative with a particular emphasis on the historical and theoretical treatment of the relationship between work and the self. It argues that, alongside important changes in the nature of modern work, our understanding of work and the relationship between work and identity can be enriched by re-considering the place of the self in historical sociological accounts and by re-emphasising some continuities with the workplace of the past. Whilst narratives of change are compelling, this chapter argues that they need to be problematised. If change has occurred it may be more in the ways in which relationships between work and the self are interpreted and understood, rather than inherent in work itself. The following section will examine some broad theoretical and historical definitions of what *work* is and the ways in which sociologists and theorists have understood it and its possible role in shaping the self. The chapter will then move onto consider the particular theoretical insights provided by the turn to the self in the sociology of work and employment and assess the importance of the shift towards a concern with the subjectivity of workers as an aspect of managerial control. The chapter concludes with an assessment of debates around the 'end of work' as a meaningful aspect of human life in the post-industrial, post-Fordist epoch and suggests that whilst work may not be central to contemporary selves it retains an important role in defining and marking late modern subjectivities.

Defining 'Work'

Relationships in and around the workplace have been major concerns of sociological inquiry throughout the history of the discipline. Founding figures, such as Marx, Weber and Durkheim, have all theorised about human productive practices as important sites of interaction from which they were able to describe broader processes of social change. British sociology in particular, in the post-war period, was able to develop, in part, due to its

analysis of relationships within the workplace. Social scientific approaches to the human world, though, have not just been used to describe relationships within the workplace, but have been complicit in constructing the workplace as a specific aspect of human experience subject to specific types of organisation and control. Aside from models of human behaviour drawn from economics that cast agents as utility maximisers, primarily motivated to satisfy needs and wants, social science has also helped define *the worker* as a particular type of figure and *the employment relationship* as a distinct type of relationship. Approaches of measurement and organisation advanced by the likes of F.W. Taylor (1947) are based upon a picture of a worker as a piece in a machine which, like other pieces, can be controlled and re-designed to fit particular tasks. More subtle approaches, such as that of the Human Relations movement, stressed the sociality of workers as agents and the connections of their experiences of the employment relationship to their experiences and position in other institutions, such as the family or peer group, as a means to explain apparently inefficient or irrational behaviours at work. It was precisely the treatment of workers as rational tools of the processes of production, rather than as human beings, that inspired the anomie identified by researchers, such as Mayo (1933), in factory workers. An appreciation of the social relationships, in which workers found themselves, both at work and outside it, produced a more complex understanding of employment relationships.

The historical emphasis on work and employment relationships in theoretical and empirical social scientific inquiry can be seen to reify the relationship between work and the self as the most important, arguably the only, site of the relationship between self and society. This can be seen as a reflection of the centrality of, in Marxist terms, the 'mode of production' or, in Durkheimian terms, the 'division of labour' to the shape that society has taken in the journey of modernity and the ways that shape has been understood. Work can be seen as a central institution in the historical development of modern

society such that, as Bauman suggests, the modern era was characterised by an image of work in which it was, “the main orientation point, in reference to which all other life pursuits could be planned and ordered.” (Bauman 1998: 17) The primacy of work, as with the primacy of other institutions of modernity such as the nation state, belies its history and the processes underlying its development. Talk about *work* then appears to be a self-evident thing about a stable and coherent category of human experience. In fact it has been demonstrated to be a highly contested category which needs examination, particularly for our purposes, in terms of the relationships between work and the self.

Contemporary talk about work is most likely to be about the most contemporary form of work organisation, i.e. employment. Sociologically though it is useful to remind ourselves of a broader definition of human productive action which is not contingent upon the particular relationships of capitalist production. Contemporary ideas of ‘employment’ or powerful sociological concepts such as ‘the labour process’ are subsets of a more general and universal aspect of human experience and activity. An etymological approach to ‘work’ (Williams 1988:335), though, reveals a history of changing meanings that goes hand in hand with the development of capitalism. When we talk about ‘work’ we are really talking about a number of levels of human experience. Arendt (1958) for example distinguishes between ‘work’, ‘labour’ and ‘action’ as distinct but overlapping aspects of the human condition. Action relates to the sociality of human beings and their interaction, specifically as related to political life. Labour relates to the processes required to satisfy the biological needs of the body, whilst work is related to the production of ‘culture’ and the aspects of society which make it ‘human’, such that

“Work is the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence, which is not imbedded in, and whose mortality is not compensated by, the species’ ever-recurring life-

cycle. Work provides an “artificial” world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings. Within its borders each individual life is housed, while this world itself is meant to outlast and transcend them all.” (Arendt 1958:7)

Contemporary understandings of ‘work’, to some extent, collate all these distinctions. Work is a necessary means to provide for material needs, as well as being a site where relationships of power are played out and a site of more general governance. It is a means of self-definition and a means of locating oneself in hierarchies of value, both economic and cultural. The question ‘what do you do?’ is not a request for a description of the activities that might make up one’s day but a specific inquiry about one aspect of those activities that enable the questioner to engage in a process of categorisation.

Sociological approaches to work must also ask ‘who do you do it for?’ and perhaps more tellingly, ‘why do you do it at all?’. Bauman suggests that work, in the development of modernity, became the most important category, such that not only the question ‘what do you do?’ but the question ‘who are you?’ was,

“for all people except those who thanks to hereditary or acquired wealth could combine a life of leisure with self-sufficiency, answered by pointing to the company by which the man asked was employed and the capacity in which he was employed by it.” (Bauman 1998 :17)

Thus *work* comes to mean *employment* and, more particularly, work for someone else with the aim or result of payment or reward. Marxist thinkers have helped to emphasise the imposed aspects of this shift in our understanding of work. From being a freely chosen activity which, in Marxist terms, was the essence of the ‘species-being’ of humanity and the very thing that defined us as human, under conditions of capitalism work is transformed into ‘labour’, the selling of one’s ability to engage in a process of creative production to another. This is experienced as an imposition that ultimately attacks and diminishes the possibility of genuine, authentic, human self-hood.

The worker works for a wage provided by someone else, on time organised by someone else, to produce commodities that ultimately will be owned by someone else. Individual human creative potential is thus diminished or exploited and the experience of work, i.e. employment, is far from an expression of one's true self but contributes to the development of alienated selves. The rise of the notion of employment also becomes to structure spatial temporal experience and to separate out work time from leisure time and the public spaces of work from the private spaces of the home. This is a crucial development for this study, providing an intriguing historical perspective to the contemporary notion that work (production) has been replaced by leisure (consumption) as the central resource for the formation of the self. The notion that selves made through the experience of consumption are uniquely contemporary is made problematic by Marx's assertion that the alienation of the worker consists precisely of a separation between time at work and 'free time'. Under conditions of capitalism, Marx suggests, the worker

"does not fulfil himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery, not of well being, does not develop freely a physical and mental energy, but is physically exhausted and mentally debased." (Bottomore and Rubel 1963: 177)

Leisure time or time away from work, then, becomes a place where the fractured, alienated self is, potentially at least, re-integrated and re-aligned. Thus,

"The worker therefore feels himself at home only during his leisure where at work he feels homeless." (Bottomore and Rubel 1963: 177)

This is a crucial distinction for this study, which attempts to use broad theoretical narratives to understand specific empirical settings. This distinction is recognised by Berger as the 'problem of work'. In developed societies at

least it apparently requires a separation between our 'real' selves and our working selves. Thus, for Berger,

“‘Real life’ and one’s ‘authentic’ self are supposed to be centred in the private sphere. Life at work thus tends to take on the character of pseudo-reality and pseudo identity...The private sphere especially the family becomes the expression of ‘who one really is’. The sphere of work is conversely apprehended as the region in which ‘one is not really oneself’.” (Berger 1964: 217-8)

Recognition of this distinction informs contemporary management practices, centred upon the self, explored in the following section and recent sociological debates about ‘the end of work’, explored in the final section of this chapter.

If the essence of Marxist constructions of work is that it is the basis for human identity, then work under conditions of developing capitalism had potentially dire consequences for working selves. The notion of alienation and the separation of one’s self from one’s work is, arguably, the single most important concept in understanding the experience of employment in relation to the self. These accounts have at their heart a construction of the self upon which the experience of work is presumed to operate. According to du Gay, “‘Alienation’ has acted as a nodal point around which discussion of the proper place of paid work in people’s lives has been conducted.” (du Gay 1996: 10) The paradox of this, du Gay argues, is that the notion of the self at work really only has value within the context of established notions of work ‘ethics’. Work is, through the notion of ‘ethics’, connected with moral imperatives that have, historically, been connected with spiritual salvation but retain implicit associations with the acquisition of full rights of citizenship. Work ethics imply the ascription of value to work to the extent that, for Heelas,

“It is difficult, if not impossible to think of people working without ascribing some value to what they are doing. Which means

there is something approaching a necessary connection between economic activity and cultural values.” (Heelas 2002: 79)

This connection is not readily visible in all types of work, either in the contemporary context, or in the historical development of work. It is hard to imagine the value ascribed to the work of those engaged in the repetitive work in the pin factory described by Adam Smith, the mindlessness of which, he argued, produced workers who were,

“as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become.” (Smith 1776: 301)

The moral and spiritual aspects of work ethics, in the thought of Weber, cast work as indicative of goodness. This did not simply imply good behavior at work but related to a whole way of being. Through the demonstration of effort and the deferral of pleasure for the righteous suffering of production, one could appear to be a worthy member of society and, in the protestant schema, win one's place in heaven. These ethics though were also implicated in discursive power struggles, as described by Thompson (1991). The benevolent philanthropists and industrialists who provided workers with a means to demonstrate their goodness also attempted to gain a disciplined, ordered workforce who would not be tempted by the threats of the alehouse. As Bauman points out,

“Factories turned out many and varied commodities, but all of them in addition produced the compliant and conforming subjects of the modern state.” (Bauman 1998: 18)

Work ethics are not however simplistic means of control of workers by management. Workers despite the apparently exploitative and alienating character of the relationships in which they find themselves can sincerely hold a belief in the inherent value of work. Equally the working environment can be reclaimed for workers through the development of alternative values and priorities which still allow for, or even contribute to, the smooth working of the

factory or firm. Paul Willis (1979) describes such a scenario in which the wage-pocket was seen as the spoils of a battle between the worker and the world. Here the notion of a 'good worker' stemmed from the evidence of appetite for and proficiency in that battle, rather than from any managerially defined criteria.

The notion of work ethic casts work as an inherently improving activity, particularly when compared to sloth. Work ethics, as Tipton outlines, can be a response to authoritarian imperatives, utilitarian or, importantly, 'expressive'. In the expressive style work is oriented towards the quality of human feelings and, "action is right because it constitutes the most appropriate or honest expression of oneself." (Tipton 1984: 283) Problematically, Heelas relates this type of work ethic with the emergence of what he terms soft capitalism. Debates around this type of construction of the contemporary experience of work and the notion of the end of work will be examined in the final section of this chapter. Of particular interest here, though, is Heelas's argument that work only matters,

"or matters most when it caters for what it is to be alive (as well as of course providing income and status). Without the training, without the opportunity to be, explore and develop oneself work is deemed unsatisfactory." (Heelas 2002: 93)

Whilst relating work to a broader sense of human activity and creativity, this construction of the work ethic places the ethical drive to fulfil oneself firmly within the workplace. Work is where, through training, one can *become*. It also changes the emphasis in work ethics away from the means to a spiritual end of salvation or as a route to the appearance of goodness. Rather, the pressure in conforming to contemporary work ethics is derived from a pressure to make the most of, or fulfil, one's *self*, as Heelas has it, "the self which has to work on itself, to enrich and explore itself." (Heelas: 2002: 81)

These types of pressures are implicated in the place of subjectivity in the understanding of what work is.

The broader Marxist definition of work as the thing that makes us 'human', though, has intriguing implications for this study of the relationship between contemporary understandings of *work* and *consumption* as resources for the self. The workplace Marx describes alienates through the separation of self from the products of work and diminishes through its lack of creativity. If work is creative human activity, the activity through which the self is made, then it is possible, arguably only possible, to do it outside the capitalist workplace. As Gorz describes,

“A market gardener ‘works’; a miner growing leeks in his back garden carries out a freely chosen activity.” (Gorz 1982:1)

For our purposes it might be more interesting to ask about the different meanings informing the market gardener who grows leeks in his/her back garden, i.e. to think about the ways in which certain types of work resemble certain types of leisure, whilst the context in which they are performed gives different levels of possibility for, in Gorzian terms, 'autonomy', or for the possibility of self-fulfilment. If contemporary ethics cast the experience of work as one which can either itself provide resources for self-fulfilment, or at least provide the means for the instrumental acquisition of these resources, work which straddles these boundaries becomes more difficult to define. Paul du Gay has written extensively on the place of service work as one such 'hybrid' space (1996). Of equal interest is the theoretical interpretation of studies such as Moorhouse's work on hot rod (1987) enthusiasts. The working day for the men in this study was characterised by monotony and lacked opportunity to demonstrate the creative use of skill. Their leisure time, though, became a place where the skills and creative abilities that the workplace diminished were allowed to be exhibited. In sociological terms, then, in addition to the question of 'what do you do?' as an inquiry relating to work, we should add a

more complex appreciation of 'where' it is that subjects say that they are doing it. The ability of work to contribute to the formation of the self, then, is not something inherent within the activity itself but an interpretation of the context in which that activity is carried out and the relationships and orientations that surround it. If, for example, employment is demeaned and diminished through, as Marx describes, the rise of technology and automation and de-skilling, particularly in the sphere of production, it is entirely possible to be employed without 'working' in the Marxist sense and to 'work' without being employed. *Real* work, the work of self-realisation and self-fulfilment in the Marxist schema, can be done away from employment relationships. This is an important distinction for this thesis and one that requires consideration of a number of controversies in the sociology of work and employment, most notably relating to the question of subjectivity and its relevance to the notion of the labour process. The following section will be a brief summary of these debates and an explanation of their relevance to this inquiry.

Governing the Soul and Managing the Heart

By far the most influential sociological account of the workplace of the last thirty years was Braverman's *Labour and Monopoly Capital* (1974), an attempt to re-tell and expand upon notions of alienation in the late twentieth century industrial workplace. In particular this work placed a concern with the Marxist notion of labour process at the centre of understanding antagonistic relations between labour and capital and stressed the capitalist nature of work relations, rather than the apparently universal understanding of work processes that characterised British industrial sociology. Braverman's contribution was in contrast to the 'plant sociology' of the time, which failed to address the systemic elements of workplace alienation in preference to an emphasis on managerial failure as the reason for worker dissatisfaction. (Spenser 2000:225, Burawoy 1996) In particular, Braverman focussed upon the centrality of de-skilling, through management control of working practices

including technological developments, to the process of reducing the possible input of workers in the process of production. As well as re-invigorating the critical study of relations of the workplace, Braverman's work has sparked a continuing debate about the labour process, which has almost become a sub-discipline of sociology itself. It is beyond the scope of this thesis, and of questionable use in the answering of specific empirical questions, to fully summarise the complexity of these contributions. More recent critical debates about the role of subjectivity in understanding the relationships of the workplace are of use, however, and it is these which will form the basis for the following discussion.

Critics of Braverman (Burawoy 1979, Willmott 1990, du Gay 1996, O'Doherty and Willmott 2001) have questioned the continued relevance of his critique, due to the apparent lack of an account of the subjective experience of the workplace. Spenser argues that this is a misunderstanding of Braverman's project to re-vitalise a radical critique of workplace relations, which necessarily interprets relationships at work as exploitative in class terms. Subjective accounts of the workplace, such as those derived from the worker satisfaction surveys of the academic sociology of the time, displaced the blame for alienation onto poor management practices, rather than being endemic in capitalist relations. Similarly positive responses to such surveys could be interpreted as evidence that alienation was not a problem and therefore that all was well in the workplace. For Braverman such an approach was apologetic and there was no "antidote to alienation beyond the abolition of capital itself." (Spenser 2000:227) Critics of Braverman suggest that this approach reduces the ability of sociological inquiry about work to say anything interesting about it other than that it is exploitative and this assertion does little to explain how the relations of capital are accomplished. Burawoy (1979) develops Braverman's thesis to acknowledge the role of subjective experiences of work in re-producing capitalist relations of the workplace. He describes acts of workplace resistance as part of a game played between

management and workers, which ultimately results in the perpetuation of structures. Workers can feel themselves empowered in the workplace through successful strategic acts of resistance. Victories in individual labour disputes become as much about the assertion of identities as the winning of material improvements, whilst the control or strategic use of technical knowledge and experience of work situations can be shown to outflank managerial priorities. However, as Collison suggests, “whatever form resistance takes it is always inextricably linked to organisational discipline, control and power.” (Collison 1994: 50) Types of resistance focussed on time, for example, can be seen to reinforce the commodity status of labour. An acknowledgement of and concentration on what Thompson (1990) terms the ‘missing subject’ in labour process theory, “opens up for inspection that difficult space where work organisation gets produced and reproduced in the everyday accomplishments of agency and social interaction.” (O’Doherty and Wilmott 2001: 459)

The novelty of the ‘turn to the subject’ in recent debates about labour process is questionable. The rhetorical image of a coherent stable self is precisely what alienation was supposed to compromise and other theoretical approaches to the experience of work, most notably those centred around Weberian notion of work ethics, have emphasised the place of self-denial and self-discipline. In the context of labour process theory, though, the opening up of a space for subjectivity allows influences from outside the workplace to inform the experience of work and vice-versa. Rather than being constituted in work alone, the self is seen as part of a more complex, discursive interaction between the workplace and the world ‘outside’, before, during and after the experience of work. There are methodological difficulties in ‘getting at’ this kind of subjectivity that Braverman’s analysis might suggest as insurmountable and complicit in exploitation but this type of analysis prevents the reification of the workplace and the reification of the working self. This reification of the workplace, paradoxically, reproduces the separation of the public and the private and, for our purposes, work and consumption. The

assumption of a self alienated in work assumes a place where workers can go to be their true selves and that this place is not alienating or subject to relations of power or structure. Kondo (1990) suggests that work relationships, whilst structural in character, are also experienced at the level of the banal or the mundane. Reflecting upon her experiences as a researcher in a Japanese factory, she suggests that,

“although it was true that company and family, economics and kinship were vibrantly meaningful arenas of everyday life for the people I knew, the idiom in which they were cast was always ineluctably, centred on persons and personal relationships.”
(Kondo 1990: 9)

The question then becomes not ‘what’ are people in these contexts (‘workers’, ‘bosses’, ‘wives’ etc.) but how do they, in Kondo’s terms, ‘craft’ themselves in these changing situations with their different requirements and power relationships? The conventional view of identity at the heart of much of work on the employment relationship can be seen as limited. For Kondo,

“identities are, in this view, fixed bounded entities containing some essence or substance that is expressed in distinctive attributes. This conventional trope opposes “the self” as a bounded essence, filled with “real feelings” and identity to a ‘world’ or ‘society’, which is spatially and ontologically distinct from the self.” (Kondo 1990: 34)

This idea of a historically constructed, culturally specific, self, rather than a fixed, essential, authentic one has been theorised most completely by Foucault (1984, 1988, 1991) and expanded upon by contemporary post-structural accounts of the experience of the workplace. Such an approach is a useful one for this study. It shifts the emphasis onto our understanding of the experience of self as a socially and historically constructed concept and the following chapter will outline the particular relationships that sociological accounts of consumption have developed between consumption and the self. The rise of these post-structural or discursive approaches to the workplace

have accompanied a shift in managerial attempts to control the workplace, which have emphasised the subjectivity of the worker as being the key resource.

Management initiatives, such as Human Resources Management (Townley 1993), Total Quality Management and programmes of 'culture change' (Strangleman and Roberts 1999, Parker 2000), have been ineluctably centred upon the self of the worker. Whilst historically Taylorist management methods (at least in their execution if not in their conception) have cast the worker as another rationalised instrument in production, more recent managerial initiatives rhetorically focus upon the worker as a self-actualising subject who can be fulfilled through the experience of work. Nikolas Rose relates this shift in emphasis to a broader shift in governance of contemporary subjects that he terms the government of the soul, a process that he argues,

“Depends upon our recognition of ourselves as ideally and potentially certain sorts of person, the unease generated by a normative judgement of what we are and could become and the incitement offered to overcome this discrepancy by following the advice of experts in the management of the self.” (Rose 1999:11)

In the workplace, managers become 'experts in the self' and the operation of techniques designed to allow workers to fulfil their potential become, at the same time, mechanisms of control and surveillance. The self that one fulfils must be one that fits with broader organisational goals otherwise it is illegitimate. As such these processes can be seen, not as a rejection of Taylorist approaches to the worker but as an extension of them to make the self of the worker visible to the employer. For Townley, “the employment relationship is an analytical conceptual space, which has geographic (at work) and temporal (time at work) dimensions. It also involves a subject – the worker. All these spaces must be rendered known and articulated before they can be managed.” (Townley 1993: 525) The problem, at least for managers,

is that the worker is the least 'knowable' of these variables. A contract of employment cannot stipulate, as Baldamus points out, an intensity of worker engagement with, or involvement in, the tasks they are obliged to perform. In fact he argues,

“though it stipulates precise wage payments for the employer nothing definite is ever said about effort or efficiency; nor anything about the components of effort, the acceptable intensity of impairment, the intolerable degree of tedium or weariness. Instead it merely mentions hours of work, type of job, occupational status and similar external conditions... Thus the formal contract between employer and employee is incomplete in a very fundamental sense.” (Baldamus 1961: 2)

Management techniques focussing on subjectivity, then, can be seen to attempt to render these informal and hidden aspects of the employment relationship visible and knowable. Tactics might vary from the design of the physical workspace (e.g. the open plan office) to the use of 'name-badges'. In the service industry, Cohen and Taylor suggest, the increasing use of 'name badges' is particularly significant. It can be seen as “an institutionalised attempt to suggest individuality within the task, in circumstances where it is not allowed to develop against it.” (Cohen and Taylor 1992: 63) Added to these tactics are the various streams of consultation, appraisal and self-evaluation that characterise the contemporary experience of work. All of these techniques are centred upon the individual worker. “The individual is the basic unit of analysis underpinning many HRM practices, that is an essential human subject whose nature is to be discovered or uncovered, and who is to be motivated through the correct procedures of recruitment, selection, appraisal, training, development and compensation.” (Townley 1993: 522) There is a tension here between the rhetoric these types of techniques (to benefit the worker in his/her quest for personal development) and the reality of the limited ways in which this development is moulded or shaped. Grey describes the functioning of this type of management in an accountancy firm. Here workers were frequently 'rated' on their performance. Whilst this was not formally

linked to procedures of sanction or of promotion, the rating and accompanying appraisal interviews represented a forum in which management could assess 'commitment' and 'drive' and advise workers on what was expected of them. According to Grey, the rating procedure was not represented as a form of surveillance, but of assistance.

"Instead of being constituted as an irksome, intrusive and threatening form of management control, it becomes a benevolent process for the realisation of perfection, a technique to assist individuals to become their true selves and to realise their aspirations." (Grey 1994: 489)

This assumes of course that one's true self lies within the framework of the firm's meanings and aims. Grey's study reveals some intriguing examples of the tensions that emerge if this is not the case, not least in the Orwellian language of the ratings forms. As one respondent reveals, "you know at the end of the day too many satisfactory ratings aren't going to be good enough." (Grey 1994: 490)

The rise of notions of 'culture' within the workplace and the role of culture in managing the workplace is an important element of this emphasis in management of employment relationships. Organisations in the retail sector on which this study is based are typified by modern managerial initiatives that focus on the 'culture' of the workplace and promoting uniform organisational cultures. Parker (2000) gives a useful outline of the ways in which contemporary managerial discourse has shifted away from an apparently rational and calculative, quantitative focus in managing organisation towards a more qualitative and ephemeral concern with 'culture' as the central site of struggle in competitive retail and service environments. Wright (1994) suggests that culture is now understood within management literature as a thing that a particular organisation *owns* rather than a thing that an organisation *is*. Lynn-Meek (1988) outlines the extent to which managerial discourse has adopted and adapted social scientific notions of how culture

operates with particular emphasis on a kind of functionalist approach which privileges interpretations of acceptable and 'deviant' behaviour. Central to this is the articulation of core organisational values to which workers are encouraged and ultimately coerced into adopting in order to perform their roles successfully and progress within a particular firm. Hochschild provides a good example of the contradictions inherent in this evocation of culture as an attempt to formalise the informal. In her study of Amerco she points to the company's provision of a *written* list of unwritten rules.

"This writing of 'unwritten' norms, this explicit articulation of Amerco culture, was what made it feel so different from the intuitive, uncodefied cultures most of us inhabit. Amerco culture had been made explicit, but the very distinction between explicitly stated corporate culture and the intuitive culture of private life was blurred and this blurring between formal and informal understandings was itself a key part of company culture." (Hochschild 2000:19)

Thus a focus on culture might rhetorically be informed by a desire to give more authority and power to workers. The reality is often one of increased conformity to organisational goals and resentment at the imposition of changes to working practices. Whilst a culture of the workplace might promote values of diversity and individuality, these are ultimately on the terms of the organisation. Equally whilst managerial initiatives focussed upon the self might privilege and encourage self-discovery and self-fulfilment, one is still only allowed to be oneself if what one is, is a good worker. There is therefore a rational, cognitive element to this evocation of culture.

An appreciation of the extent to which the self is not purely made up in the workplace allows for the conceptual space in which to demonstrate the extent to which these types of technique are experienced and even resisted by workers, but also the ways in which selves are possibly disciplined and subject to relationships of power outside of work. More recent sociological

emphasis on service work and, in particular, the notion of the management of emotional responses in interactive working environments demonstrates this. Du Gay argues that, “the inherently social nature of much service work could involve a distinct change in the cultural relations of the workplace and the production of novel, ‘hybrid’ work-based subjects.” (du Gay 1996: 4) At the same time, he suggests, “the service employee, just as much as the traditional industrial worker, is subjected to the onward march of capital’ whether the latter is conceived of as ‘organised’ or ‘disorganised’ in character.” (du Gay 1996:4) It is perhaps problematic to talk about ‘alienation’ in this kind of workplace as, in the classic Marxist sense, this was implicitly related to processes of production involved in the commodification of labour power and the commodification of the products of labour. In the service environment ‘things’ might not be produced but, as Hochschild’s (1983) classic study which defined the field of emotional labour demonstrates, *selves*, certainly are. Sosteric’s (1996) influential study of the relationship between subjectivity and the labour process in the restaurant industry demonstrates this process nicely. The study describes the effect of the imposition of a culture change programme on the working practices in a night-club, which required workers to rationalise their relationships with customers according to pre-determined patterns of interaction determined by management. This was interpreted by workers as a threat to their established ability to be autonomous in their interactions which, in the context of debates over labour process, can be interpreted as an expression of worker control over labour power. The rationalised imposition of scripted service interactions compromised the possibility of authentic self-hood at work. For our purposes what is interesting about this study is the assumption that the self prior to the culture change was authentic and coherent but the self after it was repressed. According to O’Doherty and Wilmott, such a distinction is problematic. It assumes that workers come to the workplace with no sense of themselves as self-actualising agents prior to their employment, only gain such a sense

through the experience of employment and only feel its loss thanks to a marginal change in employment practices. They suggest that

“Sosteric seems to ignore the extent to which employees were already disciplined by their own sense of self-identity during the period preceding the imposition of rigid criteria of service ...In Sosteric’s study there is no appreciation of how employees become entranced by an idea of themselves as independent subjects – a process that paradoxically enables and constrains their range of practices.” (O’Doherty and Wilmott 2001: 469)

Ideas of autonomy and self-fulfilment are implicit in contemporary managerial initiatives designed to control the workplace. However the workplace is far from being the only source of these types of meanings and so relationships at work are not the only relationships in which subjectivity is made or the only relationships in which it is compromised. Discursive approaches to workplace identity do not simply deny the importance of structural relationships in work but, by seeing work in the context of a whole life, they shift the emphasis away from the experience of work as alienating to the experience of self as a thing in need of fulfilment and the possible experience of this need as a burden rather than a liberation. Work becomes just one site where these needs are negotiated. Indeed it is the awareness of other routes to self-hood that arguably informs the more recent debate about the end of work to which we now turn.

The end of the self at work?

This chapter began with an account of a narrative of change in sociological approaches to the workplace in the context of a shift from organised, or modern capitalism, to a disorganised or post-modern model of production. This type of narrative is intertwined with other narratives of change within the social sciences that attempt to address the uniqueness of the contemporary experience of the social world. The notion of the ‘end of work’, then is a

similar one to the notion of the end of the family, the end of the nation state or ultimately the end of history. All these narratives are useful means of locating ourselves in the social world but they are sociologically problematic and should be addressed with caution. It is of particular interest to a study that concerns the book trade, and the kinds of values that underpin 'production' within the book industry, to reflect upon the weight of titles, both within sociology and management studies, that address the apparently unique experience of the contemporary workplace and the apparently changing trajectories of work organisation. That such products, subject to what Bourdieu (1996) might describe as the logic of the economic as well as the academic field of production, proliferate is not simply an unproblematic eye to the truth of a particular phenomenon. Books and ideas that stress change might always be more successful than those which argue the world is staying the same. As Parker suggests,

“The long history on work and organisations seems to suggest that we should be cautious about asserting that we live in the middle of epochal change. Much of it had been said before.”
(Parker 2000: 222)

There is no necessary correlation between the weight of titles and the truth of a particular phenomenon. However if, as Bauman (2000) suggests, sociologists are storytellers of the human condition, these narratives may also be indicative of changing values and assumptions in relation to social scientific understanding of the role of the workplace and by extension the place of production in understanding the contemporary world, at least in the West.

There are a number of potential 'endings' encapsulated within the end of work of which the most important is the end of production as the central organising institution of contemporary western societies. The coming of the post-industrial, post-Fordist, knowledge economy theorised by the likes of Daniel Bell (1978) to the West, at least, has generated both uncertainty of its

replacement and nostalgia for the apparent certainties that it offered. These processes are neither organic, nor ideologically neutral and, in the world of production, are characterised by such phenomena as the end of mass-production, the end of the factory, the reduced influence of organised labour both within and outside the workplace and the associated rhetorical changes in class or collective relationships. In place of these we have short-run, just-in-time production operating within a global marketplace for labour, the flexible firm, the rise of the service industry, the knowledge economy and the apparent replacement of collective identities, be they national or class based, with individualisation and consumer identities and ideas of 'styles of life'.

Alongside these 'endings' is an ending of the distinction between work and leisure and an end to the primacy of work in organising the time of subjects. The rise of a flexible labour force and the 'flexible firm' and the emergence of policy initiatives such as the work-life balance paint a picture of the contemporary experience of work as one rhetorically cast as about partnership rather than conflict, at least for those in work. Pollert cites a business leader predicting a

"blurring of traditional distinctions between full and part-time work, being in and out of employment, between work, leisure and education, between the formal and informal economies."
(quoted in Pollert 1988: 305)

Hochschild further problematises the distinction between the public and the private as separate and discrete spheres of human activity and suggests a complex interplay between them such that the workers she interviewed, in contrast to the figure of the worker described by Marx, felt themselves 'at home' in work. In contrast to work being experienced as a battle, one worker was able to describe a situation in which, in her workplace,

“You don’t have to check your values at the door. We have them here. Morally speaking you are protected, safe, as if you were at home.” (quoted in Hochschild 2000:20)

Alongside these positive representations of the potential subjective experience of the contemporary workplace and its relation to the self, is a far more literal end of work experienced through the replacement of workers through processes of rationalisation and the rise of automated forms of production. In the West at least this has led to bleaker pronouncements of the potential direction of work in society. Rifkin suggests a growing number of displaced workers forming a periphery around a skilled ‘core’ of symbolic producers. He proclaims, “machines are the new proletariat. The working class is being given its walking papers.” (Rifkin 1996:7) Andre Gorz (1997) similarly suggests a lack of need in the hi-tech economy for the workers that provided the basis for the generation of wealth in modernity. His more optimistic interpretation of this implies a need for a re-distribution of socially necessary work (that to satisfy societies material needs), which would allow workers more time for the autonomy he sees as central to the possible formation of coherent self-hood.

These broad theoretical, futurological and ‘macro’ societal brush strokes are bound to be muddled by the more subtle colouring afforded by a specific empirical inquiry such as this one. However some of the assumptions that these narratives of change are based on do need to be problematised as part of this enquiry, particularly as they relate to the construction of the self in work and the possible construction of the self in the rhetorically constructed post-Fordist, post-production, post-work era.

Most important of these is the rise of individualisation and its association with the rise of consumer society. The contemporary self is one theoretically cut adrift from the certainties of the recent past, one aspect of which was drawn from the position of the self in work and the ability of work to provide both for

collective identity and to allow for self-expression, if not through the creative potential of the activities of work itself, at least through the adherence to socially understood and morally coherent 'ethics'. By contrast these collective and social origins of ways of being are less evident in the late modern context and are replaced with a conception, outlined by Giddens, in which, "the self is seen as a reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible. We are not what we are but what we make of ourselves." (Giddens 1991: 75) The experience of being 'in control' of making oneself is problematic, though, and produces what Giddens has termed ontological insecurity that derives from a lack of clear messages about how we should live, if not from a growth in choices of how to be. The lack of clarity from apparently eternal and stable institutions of the past has produced a 'turn to the self'. Sennett suggests in his account of *The Fall of Public Man* that "masses of people are concerned with their single life-histories as never before; this concern has proven to be a trap rather than a liberation." (Sennett 1974: 5)

The implication of the self, produced in conditions of post-industrial work, is that it is somehow qualitatively different from the self produced in modernity (Casey 1997). The crucial aspect of this shift is the end of the realm of production as the key source of social signification and its replacement with the self. A decline in the trust in and coherence of the institutions and ethics of modernity leaves contemporary subjects cut adrift. Thus,

"With little to have faith in beyond themselves, what matters thus becomes what lies inside: one's psychology, one's personal ethicality, the quality of one's emotions, the health/vitality of one's nature; the importance of being authentic; the imperative of being true to oneself; experiencing and the value of finding out one really is and capable of experiencing and becoming." (Heelas 2002: 92)

Whilst the freedoms of the historical self were contested, its coherence, in comparison with the contemporary experience, is to be envied and even nostalgic for. A work ethic that stressed discipline and cautioned against excess, with the potential sanction of diminished spiritual reward, has apparently been replaced by an ethic to consume that privileges hedonism, to the extent that, Bell suggests, “the principles of the economic realm and those of the culture now lead people in opposite directions.” (Bell 1976:15)

Christopher Lasch has termed the contemporary self ‘narcissistic’, concerned with the satisfaction of selfish urges centred on the accumulation of material objects and shallow experience. In part these urges derive from a lack, inherent in the post-Fordist experience of work, which subjects look in vain to remedy elsewhere.

“The intense subjectivity of modern work, exemplified even more clearly in the office than in the factory causes men and women to doubt the reality of the external world and to imprison themselves in a shell of self-protection and irony.” (Lasch 1979: 102)

There is an element of nostalgia for the past certainty of work and a valorisation of historical work as somehow creative, or at least with the possibility of meaning, in this type of critique. Contemporary work has somehow been diminished both through the rise (and subsequent fall) of mass production and through the increasing automation of work, to the extent that Lasch claims,

“Advanced industrial society no longer rests on a population primed for achievement. It requires instead a stupefied population, resigned to work that is trivial and shoddily performed, pre-disposed to seek its satisfaction in the time set aside for leisure.” (Lasch 1979:126)

Within Lasch’s critique, and that of Bell, there are elements of nostalgia for the apparent certainties and contested freedoms of modernity and an element of apprehension of changes produced by mass society. It assumes a time

when industrial society *did* rest upon a society primed for achievement. Their paternal approach to contemporary subjectivities in work echoes with Adam Smith's concerns over the debased, 'stupid and ignorant' workers of the pin factory two hundred years earlier. Lasch's critique in particular has informed contemporary researchers and critics of the contemporary workplace, such as Casey (1997) and Ezzy (2001).

There are two elements to this critique of work. Firstly that it has been diminished and de-skilled. As Marx and latterly Braverman theorised, the labour power of workers has been wrested away from them and put in the 'hands' of machines and technology. The mastery of a particular part of the labour process which gave workers the possibility of producing a stable self, if not in the work itself then in their ability to control it, has passed over to the mechanised control of technology and the managerial control of machines. Richard Sennett's account of the effect of the change in the contemporary work, *The Corrosion of Character*, contains an account of a visit to a Chicago bakery he had previously studied in the 1960s. He describes the impact of technology and the production process and, crucially, the place of the workers in this process. He suggests,

"Computerised baking has profoundly changed the balletic physical activities of the shop floor. Now the bakers make no contact with the bread, monitoring the entire process via on-screen icons which depict, for instance, images of bread colour derived from data about the temperature and baking time of the ovens....The work is no longer legible to them in the sense of understanding what they are doing." (Sennett 1998: 68)

Sennett is keen to avoid romanticising the workplace of the past but he interprets the experience of workers in these conditions as not being characterised by a sense of alienation as a result of a loss but, perhaps more bleakly, demonstrating evidence of an iron cage of rationality in which the only meaningful reaction is one of indifference. Paradoxically, he suggests

that the contemporary worker is required to be skilled in the use of technology, i.e. to be computer literate, but that these skills will be of no use in the mundane, repetitive work required in which they are simply required to click on an icon to produce bread. As they are 'multi-skilled', Sennett suggests, so they are de-skilled, allowing one woman to claim, "Baking, shoe-making, printing, you name it I've got the skills." (quoted in Sennett 1998:70) A rise in universal levels of education has produced a workforce more skilled in a workplace that, due to technological advances and rationalised production, apparently needs less skill. A result of this is a rise in indifference to work as an important source of the contemporary self, which encourages instrumental attitudes to work for the sake of satisfying needs located elsewhere. As Gorz describes,

"The neo-proletariat is generally over-qualified for the jobs it finds. It is generally condemned to under use its capacities when it is in work...it cannot feel any involvement with its work or identification with its job. Work no longer signifies an activity or even a major occupation; it is merely a blank interval on the margins of life to be endured in order to earn a little money."
(Gorz 1997: 70)

Alongside this process is the second element to the critique of contemporary work. As less is required of workers, in terms of a personal relationship to work through which they can construct themselves, paradoxically, more is demanded from workers in the submission of the self to the goals of the workplace. The kind of techniques of management control, such as those outlined above, which focus upon the subjectivity of workers, result in 'inauthentic' selves. Casey (1995) and Ezzy (2001) cast the contemporary corporate worker as 'colonised' by managerial discourse or subject to managerially controlled and 'engineered' cultures which necessarily link the goals of the self to the goals of the organisation. Analogous to the greedy institutions outlined by Coser (1974), these types of workplace diminish the possibility of genuine self fulfilment. Alongside the growth of flexibility and the end of stable long term job security won through organisation, the

contemporary worker finds the workplace to be what Ezzy describes as a 'simulacrum' of community in which the loyalty and self-sacrifice demanded by workplaces is not returned to workers. Instead the worker is encouraged to see themselves as a marketable product and, through their demonstration of their commitment to the goals of the organisation, attempt to guarantee their consumption by the organisation. The result of this is that a workplace with an engineered culture becomes an "institutional site for the production of a culture of self-gratificatory, narcissistic individualism consistent with more general consumer relations." (Ezzy 2001: 631)

Workers as knowing subjects, though, are aware of the inventedness or engineered nature of the cultures of the workplace and the elements of performance and invention that is required to succeed in organisations with engineered cultures. The institutions may demand the whole self but Sennett (1998) suggests the most likely outcome is of an act, a simulacrum of commitment, characterised by detachment and indifference to work. The contemporary experience of insecurity, flexibility and a lack of the possibility of coherent narrative roles allow, even encourage, workers to actively suspend their subjectivity at work. In this sense, "embracing one's work as a vocation carries enormous risks and is a recipe for psychological and emotional disaster." (Bauman 1998: 35) By contrast, Bauman argues, in a consumer society the only meaningful vocation, the only activity worth embracing, is consumption and in particular the purchase of symbolic goods, easily understandable through styles of life. This 'end of work' marks the beginning of consumerism as the more trustworthy source for the post-modern self. It also, in this narrative of change, marks a shift from collective sources of identity, acquired through collective experiences of work, to subjective sources of identity based upon the appreciation of the notion of self that can be fulfilled through consumption. Work is, or was, experienced collectively; consumption is more readily experienced at the level of the individual.

This chapter has focussed upon shifting understandings of the experience of work as a means of beginning to problematise some sociological narratives of change. Primarily the 'turn to the subject' in the interpretation of the workplace has been placed within a broader historical context of definition of 'work' as meaningful human action. The contemporary focus on the subject as a resource to be managed has been related to older sociological narratives of work ethics and the extension of rational attempts to render the worker knowable which are implicated in the more recent debate about the 'end of work'. This project is located within these debates in a number of ways. Firstly, following du Gay, it focuses on service work as a 'hybrid' space in which the generation and management of subjective meaning is central to the performance of the work role and the broader success of organisations. Secondly it explores the ways in which this meaning in work is generated and suggests ways in which work is meaningful to workers in this industry is not simplistically a by-product of a managed 'culture' of retail organisations. As such it problematises the extent to which the rise of consumerism is necessarily coterminous with the rise of individualisation. If selves are not just produced through the experience of work in the contemporary context there is no reason to assume they ever were. Therefore, the collective identities that are assumed to be lost by the apparent decline of work might have other historical sources and there is no necessary link between consumption and the rise of the individual. The following chapter will examine the ways in which consumption might be implicated in the formation of collective identities. It will also examine the ways in which consumption, like work, has been understood as diminishing and implicated in processes of discipline in relation to the historical construction of the self.

Chapter 2 Consuming Selves

This chapter aims to review some current and historical sociological literature on consumption, particularly as it relates to questions of the self. The contemporary self, whether one characterises it as modern, late-modern or post-modern, is talked of in contemporary social scientific discourse as being qualitatively different from the selves of the recent historical past. As the preceding discussion of the relationship between the organising institution of *work* and the self has suggested, macro-level changes in social organisation such as globalisation and the apparent decline of the nation-state, the end of Fordist production, and the rise of the flexible labour market have all contributed to this change in the nature of the self. The rise of something called 'consumer society' is also considered crucial. This chapter will attempt to map some of these changes in the social scientific idea of 'the self' as they relate to 'consumption' in general and to the specific concerns of the empirical context of this thesis, the U.K retail book trade. Whilst this necessarily entails involvement with broad, theoretical debates, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to adequately summarise the huge range of competing sociological, psycho-analytical and other constructions of the contemporary self. What this chapter will attempt to do is draw selectively upon this literature to understand how notions of self and consumption might be related to work in this specific context.

When sociologists and other commentators talk about the modern self, they often do so in terms of its apparent state of crisis. Typically the modern self is described as 'fragmented', 'flexible', 'fractured', 'decentred', 'diminished', 'colonised', 'narcissistic' or even 'repressed' (Elliott 2001). These type of adjectives derive from the impact of changes as diverse as the Enlightenment through to the end of the Cold War in which, freed from the constraining influence of various structural forces, subjects are set free to find or define themselves. The diversity of potential selves that this offers though is

experienced as what Giddens calls (1991) 'ontological insecurity' – uncertainty of who we are and of our place in the world.

Consumption plays a central role for many theorists in these debates. The purchase of consumer goods is seen as a central means of self-definition of the contemporary subject, particularly in the light of the apparent decline of the workplace as a crucible in which identity might be forged. For the subject, apparently liberated from the constraints of certain structural pressures, commodities are the "principal channels for the communication of self-identity." (Warde 1994: 877) The freedom to pursue one's identity through the personal choice of consumer goods is a compelling image of the liberated contemporary self. Tradition in this schema is not experienced as a pressure to conform to an established pre-determined pattern of life but merely one of a myriad of diverse life-styles on offer. As such, consumerism is constructed as "progress on the road of rationality, materialism and secularity." (Campbell 1987: 3)

Equally, though, the self constructed through the buying of things is viewed with suspicion, as if a self made this way cannot compare with the selves of old. Consumers may be free to choose but this freedom becomes illusory if, as Giddens suggests, "the consumption of ever-novel goods becomes in some part a substitute for the genuine development of the self." (Giddens 1991:198) Side by side with the valorisation of the consumer as a hero of modernity is scepticism about the potential role of consumption in producing 'coherent', 'genuine' or 'authentic' selves. Freedom to choose might also imply freedom to be manipulated, by advertisers in the service of mass production, such that, far from offering liberation, consumption can be seen as an extension of the exploitative relations of the workplace. As well as being alienated in the workplace, contemporary consumers are arguably alienated from the possibility of true or genuine self-definition, if this self-definition revolves around trips to the market place. This type of construction of

consumption as associated with materialism and inherently shallow and 'inauthentic' is not new and arguably develops alongside the rise of mass production and consumption that emerge during and following the industrial revolution. The reduction of processes of *becoming* to the 'vulgar' working of the market was a concern of the Romantic Movement (which will be explored later) and to Marx. The ownership of 'things' or 'having' is contrasted in Marx's early writing with 'being', such that,

"the less you *are*, the less you express your life, the more you *have*, the greater is your alienated life – the greater is the saving of your alienated being...And everything which you are unable to do your money can do for you...It can acquire art, learning, historical treasures and it can travel." (Marx 1963: 172)

Thus the accumulation of 'things' is somehow a contributing factor to alienation and even art and learning, acquired through commodity exchange, are not genuinely or *authentically* acquired.

This chapter will explore some of these tensions and ambiguities, which are of particular importance to workers in retail given its existence as a 'hybrid' space linking the apparently separate worlds of *work* and *consumption*. It will begin by suggesting ways in which sociologists and social scientists have broadened out definitions of consumption away from the moment of exchange itself. Whilst contemporary society is typically characterised as a *consumer* society, other sociological and theoretical accounts of contemporary and historical societies point to the ways in which the exchange of goods has always been central to social organisation and central to industrial organisation in particular. The ways in which consumption can be thought of as an organising institution will be examined, taking into account notions of self-definition, class differences and ideas of consumption as related to discipline. Drawing upon the idea of consumption as potentially characterised by exploitative or manipulative relations of power, sociological accounts of the possibility of resistance to these types of messages will be outlined. This will

be followed by a review and development of Campbell's (1983, 1987) notion of consumption as related to the development of 'the romantic self' that is both aware and resentful of the apparent shallowness of a self constructed through the vulgar workings of economic exchange. This is of particular relevance to this project given the emphasis Campbell places in the development of the romantic self (and by extension the development of what he terms the *ethic* of contemporary consumerism) on the production, consumption and exchange of books. It also introduces the paradoxical idea of the critique of consumer society being central to its very formation. The motivation to consume can be understood as originating from a critique of consumer society itself. Following from Giddens' (1991) notion of the self as a 'reflexive project' at risk from ontological insecurity, Lash and Urry's (1994) competing or contrasting 'reflexivities' with both 'cognitive' and 'aesthetic' emphases will be explored. This will feed into a discussion of the relative importance of authenticity as the implicit lack in the contemporary self, which will be explored in relation to Walter Benjamin's (1999) notion of the aura of certain objects. These ideas will be brought together with those outlined in the preceding discussion of the workplace before the idea of 'consuming work' which will inform much of the following analysis of the workers in the U.K retail book trade is introduced.

Consumption as organising institution

Like work, consumption can be understood at a number of conceptual levels. As well as the vast array of apparently symbolic goods that may contribute to the construction of the self, consumption is also a more mundane affair concerned with the satisfaction of material wants through the interaction of economic agents. In this schema, objects are primarily wanted for their 'use value' and are consumed rationally, in accordance with the information available to the consumer as a rational economic agent. These economic relationships are increasingly constructed as typifying the interaction of

agents with a whole range of social institutions. Thus we are consumers of welfare or of higher education, rather than citizens or clients, and customers rather than passengers on public transport. Our rights as consumers are some of the most prominent of our rights in contemporary public discourse. Slater suggests that,

“consumer sovereignty is an entirely compelling image of freedom: apart from the modern right to choose our intimate partners, it provides one of the few tangible and mundane experiences of freedom, which feels personally significant to modern subjects. How emotionally charged with everyday life is the right to vote?” (Slater 1997:27)

Critics of consumer society suggest that this kind of freedom is illusory and that agents are potentially manipulated by advertisers and producers to perpetuate a capitalist system motivated by profit (Lodziak 2001).

Sociological accounts of consumption also attempt to problematise these distinctions, with reference both to the meanings that consumers attach to the goods themselves (i.e. as markers of status) and through examination of meanings attached to the economic interaction itself. This section will examine some aspects of these debates and focus upon the ways in which consumption has been depicted as more than just the economic exchange of items but as a means of organising interaction between agents, as a means of organising relationships between groups in society and as a means of disciplining and marking the potential boundaries of social action.

Contemporary social theorists stress the extent to which consumption operates as the central means of organising society, in a similar way to which work was the central means of organising society in the recent past. Bauman suggests that “the role once performed by work in linking together individual motives, social interaction and systemic reproduction, has now been assigned to consumer activity.” (Bauman 1997:27) In this light, debates about consumer sovereignty or the manipulation of consumers by advertisers are

less meaningful given the inescapability of consumption as a social fact. Just as not working was considered to be immoral or at least threatening to the prevailing social order in industrial society, so in its post-industrial equivalent, the subject, “is engaged in, has to engage in continual activity. If not he would run the risk of being asocial.” (Baudrillard 1998: 80) For Campbell this compulsion to consume, as both a means of self definition and as a means of living an acceptable type of life in a consumer society, gives wanting things a moral imperative analogous to the Weberian notion of the protestant ethic. Wanting things is not simply materialistic but the “continuous sequence of dissatisfaction and desire is propelled by an underlying sense of obligation and duty.” (Campbell 1983: 282) *Consumption* connects the individual to society. Not to buy can be viewed as asocial and dissatisfaction with what one has bought, coupled with the built in obsolescence of consumer goods, compels one to re-visit the market place. The effect is that, “the bridge crossing the gap between the individual and society has to be built over and over again.” (Gronow 1997: 99)

The notion of a society ordered around the exchange of goods as uniquely contemporary needs to be examined. Writers such as Campbell and McCracken both stress the historical importance of the consumption of symbolic goods in the organisation of Western Societies alongside the development of industrialism, to the extent that “labourers and consumers are synonymous.” (Campbell 1983:280) Anthropological accounts further suggest that contemporary western society is not the first to be organised around the symbolic exchange of goods. Systems such as the potlatch (Beynon 2000), the Melanesian rituals of gift-giving (Malinowski 1932) suggest a central relationship between the accumulation and exchange of ‘things’ and the creation of meaningful identities in human societies regardless of whether they are Western, post-industrial, post-modern or capitalist in character. James Clifford (1988) suggests an essential relationship between the notion of identity and the notion of the owner. In the West this can be traced back to

the seventeenth century, such that, “identity, whether cultural or personal presupposes acts of collection, gathering up of possessions in arbitrary systems of value and meaning.” (Clifford 1988: 217) What these accounts point to is that the meaningfulness of objects in relation to the construction of personal identity is far from uniquely contemporary, even though so many theoretical accounts of the processes of self formation treat contemporary agents as if they are coming to symbolic objects for the first time as a result of a particular path of historical development. Baudrillard (1998), for example suggests a fable for the contemporary experience of consumption can be found in the behaviour of Melanesian cargo-cults who attempted to lure down passing planes through the construction of a simulacrum of a plane out of trees and vines.

“The beneficiary of the consumer miracle also sets in place a whole array of sham objects, of characteristic signs of happiness, and then waits (waits desperately a moralist would say) for happiness to alight.” (Baudrillard 1998:31)

As compelling as this critique of contemporary consumerism is, what is it about our experience of symbolic objects that makes them any more ‘sham’ than that of other cultures or periods in history? This idea will be examined in greater detail in a following section concerning the importance of authenticity to the modern self. Firstly though, the focus will shift to ways in which consumption has been used as a marker of social distinction, both historically and in the contemporary context.

Consumption, class and distinction

Sociological accounts of consumption suggest that, whilst the rhetoric of the consumer society is that of the individual freed from structural constraint to pursue his or her own identity through the purchase of symbolic goods, consumption is also central to the formation of group identities and to the

perpetuation of class distinctions and divisions. The most comprehensive account of the field of consumption as related to class is provided by Bourdieu (1984) in *Distinction*, a large-scale study of the field of contemporary cultural consumption that demonstrates how different social classes tend towards different symbolic objects. This is a useful idea for this study as the production and consumption of 'books', both as objects in themselves compared to other objects and through notions of 'genre', are used and talked of as markers of difference and membership of social groups. These ideas will be explored in later chapters. Again though it is interesting to point to the historical precedents for this kind of use of goods.

If consumption is to do with identity, then almost by definition in sociological discourse it is also to do with performance, following Goffman (1990) and to do with status, following Veblen (1970). Ideas of conspicuous consumption have become central to our understanding of contemporary consumerism, the idea of 'keeping up with the Jones's' amounting to a common-sensical, rational, justification for the purchase of symbolic things. Such meanings have long historical roots. The relationship between goods and social status, famously outlined by Veblen, can again be seen as central to the development of contemporary consumerism and by extension central to the development of industrial societies. McCracken (1990) points out how, in the West at least, the purchase and display of goods has long been a battleground in struggles over status, authority and power. He describes for example the centrality of excessive consumption to the demonstration of wealth and status in the Elizabethan court.

"Objects, especially in the context of a highly ceremonial court could be made to communicate the monarch's legitimacy of rule, aspirations for the kingdom, qualities of power and majesty." (McCracken 1990: 11)

Further, for noblemen called to court, excessive consumption was, paradoxically, a means of gaining the attention and ultimately the financial favour of the monarch and a means of establishing legitimate claims to status. This is contrasted by McCracken to the notion of the 'cult of family status' that existed amongst the Tudor family, through which goods were required to display the *patina* of age and use by previous generations as a symbol of continued wealth and social position. The ability to buy things in itself did not confer status; rather, through patina it was suggested that existing claims to status were legitimate and authentic. Until it was eclipsed in the eighteenth century with the rise of the newly wealthy industrial bourgeoisie,

" *patina* as both a physical and a symbolic property of consumer goods was one of the most important ways that high-standing individuals distinguished themselves from low-standing ones and social mobility was policed and constrained." (McCracken 1990:31)

The need for the policing of social mobility is central to the role of consumption in perpetuating social distinctions. The relationship between consumption and questions of discipline and resistance will be outlined in the following section. What concerns us here is the role of consumer goods as the rhetorical means by which consumers as exemplars of contemporary liberated subjects are able to *choose* their identities. Whilst one could buy the goods of superior social groups in the Tudor period, one could not assume the social status of these groups in a simplistic way. Indeed, sumptuary laws prohibited fraudulent claims to status through consumption. With the decline of patina, more subtle means of policing social mobility were developed by high status groups that centred on the consumption of culture. McCracken terms these 'invisible ink strategies', through which, "certain social groups cultivate certain kinds of knowledge (of songs, poems, plays, dances, wines, decorum, clothing and so on) and they make these the crucial and most telling acts of belonging." (McCracken 1990:35)

What these invisible strategies aim to do is prevent the possibility of faking status or manipulating symbolic goods to give the appearance of status. This is of particular use in understanding the contemporary experience of consumption in terms of performance and display of identities. In the contemporary urban context of *Gesellschaft*, Corrigan suggests, “conspicuous consumption is an ideal way of displaying one’s pecuniary strength to those who know nothing of one apart from what they see.” (Corrigan 1997: 17) This requires more complex strategies for the organisation and protection of authority and legitimacy. The rise of the notion of good taste as an important marker of division between social classes is most comprehensively outlined for the contemporary context by Bourdieu (1984). For this study, the idea of taste is doubly useful. It illustrates how sociological accounts complicate notions of consuming selves as inherently liberated. Secondly it points towards the ways in which consumption has been historically associated, not just with class division but also, through the emergence of the notion of the ‘romantic self’, with a critique of capitalist relations. This latter point will be explored in a later section of this chapter. For Bourdieu though, choices of goods and services in a consumer society are profoundly informed by notions of social class and through the distribution of ‘cultural’ or ‘symbolic’ capital. Whilst formal laws and rules do not prevent or preclude social mobility, there are invisible strategies at work in the organisation of society through consumption. Cultural capital, much like the image of authority drawn from the notion of patina, can be inherited but it can also be acquired through formal education and through the informal knowledge of the codes and conventions of consumption as it relates to what Bourdieu describes as ‘legitimate culture’. Knowledge of which activities constitute worthwhile ways to spend one’s money and crucially one’s time become central to informing choices and perpetuating distinctions. In drawing on these discourses the self realised through consumption is, in some sense, reflexive. However the self being actualised here is not one free from social

and structural constraint. 'What' and 'how' one consumes ties one to particular types of identity.

The notion of consumption itself is linked with vulgarity for some social groups. Slater for example describes how,

"culture is not consumed (however much the opera going bourgeoisie may pay for their tickets) but rather it is appreciated by a cultured audience; art is not manufactured it is created."
(Slater 1997: 70)

This is a particularly useful idea for exploring ambiguous status of cultural artefacts, including, for the purposes of this thesis, books, as both commodities to be bought and sold (consumed) and repositories of cultural legitimacy to be appreciated. Taste, in Bourdieu's famous phrase 'classifies the classifier'. In terms of creating a social identity from the purchase and appreciation of certain types of goods, taste operates to demonstrate distinction and refinement. It operates as what Bourdieu terms *habitus* – a structuring structure which implicitly guides social classes to the goods and services more suited to them. This is not simply a case of social exclusion of those that lack the knowledge of the appropriate codes but a demonstration that different social classes draw upon different codes, informed by their differing levels of accumulation of cultural capital. Thus,

"Taste functions as a sort of social orientation, 'a sense of one's place' guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties and towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position." (Bourdieu 1984: 466)

Whilst there is the possibility of movement between classes, through the accumulation of the knowledge of the codes of a competing or superior class, this has personal risks in terms of cutting oneself off from a class of origin.

The boundaries between classes are particularly strong in relation to knowledge and appreciation of art, Bourdieu suggests. Art is constructed as a world apart from the mundane field of consumption. He uses the example of manual workers reactions to modern art as being indicative of their lack of appreciation of the codes and specialist language of art appreciation. Not understanding an artwork, for Bourdieu, is indicative of exclusion from cultural capital. However, for Bourdieu, it does not follow from this that middle class viewers know or appreciate art in a more authentic sense. Rather,

“the confessions with which manual workers faced with modern art betray their exclusion contrast with the knowing silence of the bourgeoisie, who, though equally disconcerted at least know that they have to refuse, or at least conceal the naïve expectation of expressiveness that is betrayed by a concern to understand.” (Bourdieu 1984:43)

This rule bound appreciation of art or culture is again particularly relevant to the study of books and those who work with them. What it also points to is that legitimate cultural consumption is a process of discipline and control. The relationship between consumption and class division further emphasises the extent to which contemporary images of consumerism, as related to the freely chosen self, are problematic. The next section will build upon these ideas by describing theoretical perspectives that imply a role for consumption in disciplining contemporary subjects, and touch upon ways in which consumption is also tied up with notions of resistance and rejection of relationships of power.

Consumption and discipline

The preceding discussion has outlined the ways in which consumption can be understood more broadly than the rational exchange of commodities and the satisfaction of material wants. Instead it can be seen as a central organising institution of society which includes means of conferring legitimacy on and

distinguishing between social classes. This latter point, in particular, points towards a role for consumption in ordering society and disciplining contemporary subjects – a role that of course stands in stark contrast to the picture of the consumer society as being peopled by freely actualising subjects. There are a number of levels in which consumption can be related to questions of discipline and power. Firstly, the centrality of consumption to social life, as suggested in the previous section, means that subjects are required to engage in consumer activity in order to have meaningful social interactions. Further, the association of consumption of objects with the perpetuation of social class divisions has historically involved the explicit involvement of the state in regulating who is able to buy what. The sumptuary laws of Elizabethan England are the most obvious examples of this, though Williams also points out the restrictions on the sale and ownership of bibles in sixteenth century Europe (Williams 1965: 180). The aesthetic intolerance outlined by Bourdieu (1984) also builds upon the idea that freedom of choice in consumer society is restricted by ideas of legitimate and illegitimate consumption – a right and wrong way in which to choose. The act of buying itself is clearly governed by rules and conventions of conduct that are backed up with legislative sanction. Featherstone suggests that there are strict rules of self-discipline involved in the experience of consumer society.

“The imagery may summon up pleasure, excitement, the carnivalesque and disorder, yet to experience them requires self-control and for those who lack such control there lurks in the background surveillance by security guards and remote-control cameras.” (Featherstone 1991: 26)

The temporal organisation of consumption is an important aspect of this. Consumers and workers are in some senses synonymous but time spent at work and time spent in consumption can be experienced very differently. ‘Consumer time’ is very much leisure time, with all the implications that has for liberation and celebration. Historically and in the contemporary context, sociological accounts problematise the notion of leisure time as *free* time.

Instead the focus is on the ways in which leisure time is shaped and constrained by prevailing discourse of correct behaviour, such as Weberian work ethics. Not all types of leisure are legitimate uses of free time. From a Marxist perspective leisure time is a period for the reproduction and re-creation of the labour force. E.P Thompson (1991) outlines the ways in which developing industrial society disciplined workers, used to the rhythms of seasonal production, to the daily grind of the factory. Industrialists concerned themselves with their work force wasting time in trivial or bawdy pursuits that may have affected their ability to work efficiently. Clarke and Critcher (1985) outline the ways in which leisure time has, historically, been a site of struggle, as ruling classes attempt to impose socially useful standards of behaviour. Similarly, Baudrillard suggests contemporary subjects need to be trained in consumption much as the rural populace of the nineteenth century was trained for production. Thus,

“the rational and disciplinary ethics which was according to Weber at the origins of modern productionist capitalism in this way invests a whole area which had previously excluded it.”
(Baudrillard 1998: 81)

There are echoes of this in the preceding discussion of different social groups' attitudes to different types of cultural consumption. In terms of 'time', Lash and Urry for example suggest,

“middle-class households spend large amounts of time and concentration in various forms of culture consumption. The consumption of culture simultaneously involves the use of time in order to accumulate cultural capital. In the working class, households are said to consume popular culture through 'wasting time' or 'passing time'.” (Lash and Urry 1994: 58)

The consumption of books, and its association with the production of cultured, well-rounded selves, means that this kind of construction of cultural activity as *worthwhile* is an important consideration for this project.

Some contemporary sociological accounts that stress the decline of work as a central organising institution of society point to the ways in which contemporary consumer society requires its subjects to be 'hedonistic' in their leisure time. Willis suggests that,

“whereas the ideal model for the worker is the good, time kept, the disciplined and the empty-headed, the model for the good consumer is the converse – a head full of unbounded appetites for symbolic things.” (Willis 1990:19)

Other accounts, building upon Foucauldian (1986, 1988) notions of self-governance and self-discipline suggest that this image of the consumer is only a rhetorical one and that, in fact, contemporary consuming subjects are governed by subtle forms of persuasion and control, centred upon the notion of the self. Slater suggests that, “for Foucault, unlike for liberalism, becoming a choosing self is not a liberation but a strategy for modern governance.” (Slater 1997: 61) Turner focuses his interpretation of Foucault's notion of 'care of the self' onto the practical management of the body in a way that links the development of consumerism with discipline. Historically, Turner suggests, ascetic lifestyles based upon abstinence and the control of sensory experience were central to the perpetuation of moral order. The Weberian 'work ethic', in which the deferral of gratification was central to living a 'good' life, is the most coherent example of this. The rise of industrialism and, in particular, 'urban man' was considered a threat to this, requiring human appetite and desires to be managed. Turner reviews medical literature from the eighteenth century as presenting,

“a contrast between man in a state of nature, without the existence of culinary arts which unnaturally stimulated the appetite and urban, sedentary man, exposed to the dangers of civilisation where art and a plentiful supply of rich foods interrupted the normal process of digestion.” (Turner 1992:188)

This is linked, in the contemporary context, with the prominent aspects of consumer society, which connect the maintenance of the self with the maintenance of the body. Drawing on Turner, Elliott suggests that, “the increasing emphasis on fitness hygiene, thinness and youthfulness are central planks in the maintenance of self-regulation in relation to consumer capitalism.” (Elliott 2001:97) The consuming self, in this sense, can be seen as a highly disciplined self, tied to particular narratives of the right way to eat, exercise and care for the body through the purchase of consumer goods. For this study, this can be broadened out from the care of the physical body to other aspects of the maintenance of the self – what Rose has termed ‘the government of the soul’. This conception of the self depends upon

“our recognition of ourselves as ideally and potentially certain sorts of person, the unease generated by a normative judgement of what we are and could become and the incitement offered to overcome this discrepancy by following the advice of experts in the management of the self.” (Rose 1999: 11)

This is a particularly useful construction of the consuming self for this project in that it relates both work and consumption to the notion of improving or fulfilling the self. In terms of consumption it resonates strongly with Campbell’s (1983, 1987) assertions about the relationship between the rise of consumer society and the historical rise of the very idea of the self as a thing owned and controlled by individuals and conceptualised as a resource to be maximised. This has important implications for the possibility of consumption being a tool for the construction of a genuine or authentic self and for the use of consumption to challenge or resist structures of power. If there are right and wrong ways to consume, then some sociological accounts have stressed the ways in which certain groups deliberately flout such rules in the pursuit of resistant identities.

Much as resistance has been theorised as an important part of the working self (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999), there is evidence of resistance as central

to the consuming self. The examination of processes of sub-cultural formation illustrates the ways in which the symbolic consumption of things can be used by groups to deliberately outrage conventional society. Hall et al. (1975) and Hebdige (1979) provide the most spectacular accounts of this, focussing on the emergence of punk and other youth sub-cultures. A more mundane example of particular interest to this project is provided by Radway's work, *Reading the Romance*, which implies that the consumption of 'romance novels' by fans allows the creation of a resistant space away from the roles of constantly available housewife and mother (Radway 1984). This is echoed in the exemplary theorist of resistant consumption, Michel de Certeau who sees in acts of personal consumption, including reading,

“clever tricks of the weak within the order established by the strong, an art of putting one over on the adversary on his own turf, hunter's tricks, manoeuvrable, polymorphic mobilities, jubilant poetic and war-like discoveries.” (de Certeau 1984 p.40)

The particular role of the consumption of books and the particular power struggles involved in their production and distribution illustrate many of these points about consumption. These ideas will be explored in a later chapter.

Of course, in a society apparently organised around consumption, such apparently resistant acts are within the boundaries of acceptability and can even be encouraged. Such 'revolutions', Baudrillard suggests, “take place every day at that level but they are 'fashion revolutions' which are harmless and foil the other kind.” (Baudrillard 1998: 95) Even resistant consumption is arguably based upon a disciplinary need for self-expression and self-definition achieved through the purchase of goods. Reifying resistance assumes the existence of an internal mental autonomy, a place where identity work is done and where the self is authenticated. This notion of the authentic self is central to the theoretical construction of an ethic of consumption outlined by Campbell (1987). Rather than suggesting a role for consumption in

challenging established structures of power under capitalism, Campbell suggests a central place for consumption in the very development of modern industrial society in which the ethic of consumerism is paradoxically informed, not by a whole-hearted acceptance of the relations of capitalism on the part of modern subjects, but by a partial rejection of them.

The ‘romantic’ self and the ‘romantic ethic’

The social facticity of consumption, outlined by writers such as Baudrillard and Bauman, points to the obligation to consume in contemporary society in order to engage fully in social life. The work of Campbell can be seen to provide an interesting perspective on this view of contemporary consumerism, particularly in the light of the preceding discussion of consumption as a means of discipline in general and a means of self-discipline in particular. The social sanction that follows improper or ill-disciplined consumer attitudes can be seen to centre on a particular social understanding of the self. According to Campbell, in traditional societies, attitudes to consumption were constrained by a static feudal based economic system. The result of this is that,

“striving to better oneself is immoral and socially threatening. Wants are “needs” and limited. The fixity of need is in turn closely linked to the perceived fixity of social structure and status.” (Campbell 1983:281)

By contrast in contemporary societies, Campbell suggests, consumption is not about the satisfaction of wants or needs at all, as much as the carrying out of a ‘duty’ or ‘obligation’. In the contemporary context,

“the revolution of rising expectations means that everyone not only expects to ‘better’ himself but is considered ‘immoral’ not to

strive to do so; this means an obligation to seek out and satisfy new wants.” (Campbell 1983: 281).

The source of these wants is not, according to Campbell, simply emulative desire, as Veblen would suggest, nor is it a result of manipulative media promoting ideological messages, as critics of mass consumption might contend. In contrast to the constructions of the self as inherently shallow or narcissistic, the wants which inspired the consumption of the romantic self, which Campbell suggests informs contemporary attitudes to consumption, are, paradoxically, driven by a critique of materialism and a search for authentic experience. For Campbell,

“the spirit of modern consumerism is anything but materialistic. The idea that contemporary consumers have an insatiable desire to acquire objects represents a serious misunderstanding of the mechanism, which impels people to want goods. Their basic motivation is the desire to experience in reality the pleasurable dramas which they have always enjoyed in imagination and each new product is seen as offering a possibility of realising that ambition.” (Campbell 1987:90)

The desire to want results from an emergence of the self and the notions of self-fulfilment, which, for Campbell, have specific roots in the Romantic Movement, which he locates in the period 1750-1780 – a crucial period in the industrial revolution. Campbell’s account intriguingly suggests that the romantics (writers, philosophers and particularly artists of the period) stood in stark opposition to the emerging rationality, utilitarianism and materialism of industrial society. Rather, they rejected these trends as ‘soulless’. According to Campbell, “they could be said no more to favour the pursuit of consumer goods than Calvin approved of the pursuit of wealth. However the consequence of their philosophy proved equally ironic and unseen.” (Campbell 1983: 285) Intriguingly for this project, Campbell also emphasises the emergence of the novel as central to the promulgation of romantic thought. Whilst the symbolic importance of books will be discussed more fully

later, it is worth noting at this point their historical importance in the processes this chapter is attempting to map. According to Corrigan,

“if the working classes were fundamental to the development of production, readers of novels were fundamental to the development of consumption.” (Corrigan 1997:2).

Defining romanticism as a coherent philosophy is problematic. Much like contemporary theoretical attempts to ‘define’ post modernism, any attempt to pin down precisely what romanticism might mean in the contemporary context, or meant to those involved in the ‘movement’, might be dismissed as un- romantic. For Campbell, romanticism can be “justifiably presented as more of an impulse than a unified system of ideas, and what’s more, an impulse towards chaos.” (Campbell 1987: 179) There are four key aspects of ‘romantic thought’ that are of particular use to this project.

Firstly the notion of the *individual*, as a separate and distinct entity, that emerged from the Enlightenment. Campbell quotes Rousseau as summarising the essence of this doctrine when he declared, “I am not made like any of those who are in existence. If I am not better, at least I am different.” (Rousseau quoted in Campbell 1983:285). For Campbell,

“this is a radically different doctrine of the person, who is no longer conceived of as a “character” constructed painfully out of the unpromising raw material of original sin, but as a ‘self’ liberated through experience and strong feelings from the inhibiting constraints of social convention.” (Campbell 1983: 286)

Romanticism was also characterised by a fear or suspicion of emerging modernity, experienced as increased urban living, rational industrial production and the rise of the market as the central means of distributing value and power. As we have seen in our discussion of work, there was a concern expressed by writers such as Smith or Marx, that the emergence of

industrial capitalism would have detrimental effects upon the subjectivities of workers. This can be interpreted as a reflection of an idea inherited from romanticism, that 'the self' is affected by external experience, and that experience should, as far as possible, be oriented towards the creation of an autonomous, unique, fulfilled individual. Not work in itself, but the types of mundane soul-destroying work of the factory stifled this creation. True happiness could emerge, not simply through the expression of communally held rights, but through the declaration of uniqueness and separation of the individual from society, i.e. through self-expression and personal creativity. Gaukroger (1986) makes a specific link between Marx and romanticism through the idea of work under conditions of capitalism as a threat to a 'species-being', an idealised, natural self, made possible through non-alienated, de-commodified, labour. The self who had emerged from the Enlightenment was threatened with being re-cast as a mass by anonymous urban life and by rational production methods. Much as Smith (1776) condemned the possibilities of the self in the factory context, so writers such as Ruskin condemned the machines of production as only able to make dead things and "dead things communicated their deadness to all who used them." (Trilling 1972: 127) The association of industry with progress was rejected in this view that was partly nostalgia for a pre-industrial pastoral period, partly fear of the emerging social order and partly a rejection of its values of rationalism, empiricism and materialism. The poet Shelley, for example, scorned promoters of 'utility' as to blame for social unrest through the "unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty" and the "cultivation of the mechanical arts" (Shelley quoted in Campbell 1987: 188) at the expense of developing 'genuine' human activity, such as poetry.

The third key aspect of romanticism, following from this, was the privileging of 'the emotional' over the 'rational' – two aspects of human experience which have, in Western thought at least, been considered antagonistic since the Enlightenment (Williams 1998). Whilst 'emotion' can be considered a 'natural'

state of individuals, Campbell argues that in fact the concept of emotion is historical and contingent. Whereas in the modern world emotions are understood as a source of agency that stems from 'within', in pre-modern cultures "the main sources of agency were viewed as existing outside of man, from whence they not only forced him into actions but also filled him with distinctively aroused states." (Campbell 1987: 72) Central to the project of the Enlightenment were a disenchantment of this external world and an 'enchantment' of the inner world. In the development of romanticism, the display of emotion was considered to be an indication of authenticity (a concept that will be examined in the following section of this chapter) in comparison to both the rational, calculable mechanical world of production and the stifling world of tradition. Whilst society concerned itself with the rational pursuit of profit at the expense of the self, the display of emotion, or 'sensibility', was central to the expression of individuality. Whilst there was the possibility of fake or excessive emotions, these were thought to be in the service of rational or calculable goals of self-interest and thus rejected. For Campbell, the person of true sensibility was "defined as someone who is bound to be an outsider. Thus, as the dandies represented the triumph of propriety over sincerity, so the romantics come to represent the reverse." (Campbell 1987: 177)

The artist and writer had crucial roles in this development, operating as specialists of the self, freed from the baser drives of wealth accommodation and inspired by a need to express themselves through their work. The emergence of such concepts as bohemianism - the deliberate attempt to flout social convention through the experience of excess - offered a prototype for emerging subjectivity influenced by romantic thought. More crucially for this project, the experience of art was a source of 'moral renewal' (Campbell 1987:1987), through which the audience (or consumers) of art could cleanse themselves of the vulgar machinations of the modern world. The role of the

book, particularly through novels and poetry, was central to this as it allowed for the personal, privatised experience of art. In the romantic doctrine, the experience of the artist who produced the work is effectively re-created for the reader who is subsequently *improved* by it. Thus, when a popular romantic poet such as Wordsworth produced his works and others read them,

“the experience is re-created with sufficient vividness for them to share his emotions. In this way, their capacity to both imagine and empathise is generally cultivated with beneficial effects for them as well as for all those with whom they have dealings.”
(Campbell 1987: 189)

This notion of ‘self-improvement’ links nicely with the preceding discussion of consumption as related to discipline. Furthermore, much as McCracken outlined the ‘invisible ink strategies’ of the threatened aristocracy to maintain their legitimacy, the ‘correct’ way to experience and react to (or consume) art and learning was intimately tied in to these developments of the romantic self. The following chapter will outline some of the power struggles over the consumption of books historically and suggest ways in which these notions of romanticism feed into the contemporary experience of work in the book industry.

Campbell suggests that the contemporary experience of consumer society is informed in quite explicit ways by discourses of the romantic self. Use-value is not necessarily a prime concern and nor is strictly emulative motivation. Rather, the motivation to consume and the ethic of consumption are derived from a construction of the self as a resource to be realised through experience. The self was of course a focus of the protestant ethic of production – self-denial and self-discipline associated with morality and spiritual salvation. For Campbell, the romantic ethic can be seen to be equally transformatory.

“Heaven in such a doctrine is the fulfilment of self, hell the subjugation of self to the constraining demands of custom and convention; hence not a rationalising self-denying activity but consistent self-gratificatory activity becomes a revolutionary force.” (Campbell 1983:293)

In this sense, Campbell’s version of consumption is arguably similar to that of Bauman or Baudrillard in that it requires constant return to the market. In a crucial sense, though it is different. The motivation for consumption is to be true to oneself, often in spite of the apparently shallow relationships with goods on offer in the market place. The following section will draw together the preceding debates over the status of consumption as an organising institution and the idea of the contemporary reflexive self as inherently insecure with particular focus on the idea of authenticity.

Authenticity and the self

I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat;
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world’s eyes
As though they’d wrought it.
Song let them take it,
For there’s more enterprise
In walking naked.

W.B.Yeats, *A Coat*

The accounts of the contemporary self that began this chapter outlined the ways in which the contemporary, late-modern or post-modern experience of the self is one of crisis. There is a surprising coincidence between Marxist accounts of the contemporary self as inherently diminished by the social

facticity of consumption, post-structuralist accounts of the self as colonised by discourses of discipline and self-governance through consumer society, and more conservative account such as Lasch's (1979) focus on the end of the family as a stabilising institution for the narcissistic modern self. Even thinkers for whom shifts towards late or high or post-modernity open up the possibility of human agency in the moulding of a self-identity also stress the inherent dangers of relying upon consumption as a means of achieving a genuine or deep self. Thus Giddens (1991), for whom the reflexive self opens up a hitherto inaccessible variety of potential selves, warns against relying on 'ever novel consumer goods' and Bauman (1998), for whom the idea of self as a project is a potential liberation from tradition and the panoptical institutions of the workplace, also suggests the fast moving world of flexible work and consumerism prohibits the building of 'solid foundations'.

The impossibility of the contemporary experience of consumerism, or contemporary relationships with symbolic goods has echoes with romanticism and the feelings of loss of the possibility of 'true' expression in the rational world of production or the shallow world of materialism. This narrative can be seen to resonate strongly with Marx's suspicion of any goods or experience which are 'infected' by the market. There is a sense of loss of authentic culture, or authentic experience, which seems inevitably, debased or compromised through commerce (Clifford 1988). In the world of consumerism the difference between appreciating culture and wasting time on frivolous activities, as outlined in the preceding section, is informed by class distinction. It also suggests a place in the theoretical discussion of consumption for the notion of authenticity as a means of connecting with the kinds of universal truths and experiences, which romanticism inspired. Authenticity was central to romanticism and, for thinkers such as Rousseau, it was society itself that implicitly destroyed the possibility of having a self to which one could be true. It is, for Trilling, an inherently polemical concept, "indicative of our anxiety over the credibility of existence and individual existences." (Trilling 1972: 93)

Lash and Urry (1994) develop the idea of reflexivity to suggest the possibility of a role for symbolic goods (particularly those they describe as products of 'the culture industries') in the construction of coherent selves in modern and late-modern contexts. Drawing on Taylor (1989), they suggest competing modes of reflexivity through which selves can be constructed. The first, and closest to the work of Giddens, is *cognitive reflexivity*, concerned with the use of information drawn from expert systems to monitor the self. One might suggest that the untrustworthiness of consumerism for this type of reflexivity is that the information one receives inevitably points one back to the market place. Self-hood can never be quite complete or the self can never be quite good enough. Further the speed at which goods appear to circulate in consumer capitalism, and the myriad of meanings attached to them through sophisticated advertising techniques, results in an all-encompassing process of commodification. Thus,

"objects become disposable and depleted of meaning. Some of these objects.... produce many more artefacts or signs than people can cope with. People are bombarded with signifiers and increasingly become incapable of attaching 'signifieds' or meanings to them." (Lash and Urry 1994: 3)

Alongside this cognitive strand to reflexivity is an *aesthetic reflexivity*, which is informed more readily by discourses drawn from romanticism about the self as a thing not to be monitored but 'interpreted' as a being in the world. As such it requires a "search for 'original', uncorrupted symbols before the fall into excess mediation, commodification and the like." (Lash and Urry 1994: 48) Whilst cognitive reflexivity is based upon the rationalist assumptions of the Enlightenment based upon a particular relationship between the self and the world, aesthetic reflexivity owes more to the anti-rationalist sentiments of romanticism. The ontological insecurity, apparently inherent in relations to the world inspired by cognitive reflexivity, is effectively fought off by aesthetic reflexivity and its search for the 'universal' aspects of human experience as a

means by which to pre-judge and interpret the self, much as the romantics were in awe of nature and embraced emotion. Whilst the 'unit' of cognitive reflexivity might be the 'worker', the 'unit' of aesthetic reflexivity is not simply 'the consumer' but a particular figure of the consumer, approximating to the flâneur.

The flâneur is a contested figure in the sociology of consumption and urban life in particular (Tester 1994). Initially a description of the figure of 'urban man' based in Paris and based upon the writings of the poet Baudelaire in the nineteenth century (Benjamin 1997) it has come to represent a whole set of values and attitudes in the relationship between self and society in modernity. Aldridge (2003) suggests the flâneur has been thought of, as amongst others, a 'dandy', a 'window-shopper', 'a playful stroller', a 'voyeur', an 'amateur detective'. Central to all these constructions of this almost mythical figure is ambivalence towards modernity and urban life. According to Bauman, "the flâneur seeks the crowd but he also needs the elbow room which the man of the crowd does not have and does not want to have." (Bauman 1994: 139) The flâneur is a figure intimately involved in modern life but also somehow separate from it, as Benjamin has it, "abandoned in the crowd." (Benjamin 1997: 55) Like the romantic artist, the flâneur can be seen as a figure that accumulated experience through looking at the world but not engaging with it, standing aloof from and appearing cynical of the emerging modern order. Contemporary theorists such as Bauman (1994) and Featherstone (1991) have suggested that some of these meanings associated with flânerie survive into the contemporary experience of consumption. However, for Bauman at least, the flâneur is seduced into consumer society. For the postmodern flâneur, "the dividing line has been blurred. It is no longer clear what (who) is the object of consumption and who (what) is the consumer." (Bauman 1994: 146) This thesis will suggest that Bauman overstates the inevitability of this and that, in certain aspects of cultural consumption, there retains the possibility of a studied distance from the world in the contemporary self.

The appreciation of art plays a particularly important role in this. As discussed, for the romantics, the artist was seen as a specialist of the self, whose experiences and proximity to the 'universal' aspects of human life (or to nature) could be translated for the audience, through the reading of poetry or novels. Similarly, the work of art itself becomes an object designed to represent or evoke the solid, universal truths of human experience, rather than the mundane alienating consequences of ownership of 'things'. Thus,

“for the audience, its expectation is that through its communication with a work of art, which may be resistant, unpleasant, even hostile it acquires the authenticity of which the object itself is the model and the artist the personal example...The authentic work of art instructs us in our inauthenticity and adjures us to overcome it.” (Trilling 1972: 100)

Benjamin's influential essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* succinctly summarises the continuing relevance of these ideas to the modern context of consumer capitalism. For Benjamin, in the pre- and early industrial age, a work of art was appreciated precisely because of its uniqueness in time and space, “imbedded in the fabric of tradition.” (Benjamin 1999: 217) Art was a central element of religious pilgrimage and ritual and thus a central means of organising and unifying society. It was also a means of expressing power, with certain social groups having privileged access to works of art. There are elements of survival of these aspects of art appreciation today that resonate with Bourdieu's work in *Distinction* and the relationship between art appreciation and social class. Whilst Benjamin saw the reproduction of art and the accompanying shattering of tradition as a positive and inevitable move of society towards socialism and a “renewal of mankind” (Benjamin 1999: 215), certain objects retain an 'aura', which evoke these ideas of uniqueness and of authenticity. As well as retaining the ability of certain objects to be used as markers of social position, for Lash and Urry,

the idea of aura, “entails that a cultural object proclaim its own originality, uniqueness and singularity.” (Lash and Urry 1987: 286)

This uniqueness can be translated for the contemporary consumer of mass-produced culture as a search for a different kind of relationship to the world than that implied by cognitive reflexivity and a different relationship to objects than simple accumulation and ownership. The consumption of culture becomes implicitly linked with an attempt to be ‘true to oneself’ in the face of contemporary pressures. Thus,

“auratic experience is shot through with a utopian power. It holds within it a capacity for a kind of looking that is ‘Other’ to the divided object-subject of capitalist rationality.” (Latham 1999: 467)

Indeed the association of oneself with ‘auratic’ objects, notably for this project, with ‘books’ as resources for the construction of the romantic self, can be seen as an attempt to distance oneself from the fast changing world of consumer capitalism.

As we have seen, for some contemporary theorists, consumption offers an inherently unstable or untrustworthy resource in the process of reflexively creating the self. Ideas of aura and aesthetic reflexivity complicate this by implying a place for the consumption of certain goods in attaching the self, not to the apparently ephemeral shifting sands of contemporary consumer society but to more concrete, if contested, notions of universal experience. Whilst consumer society offers a bombarding with the new and the different, appreciation of auratic experience equally offers an attachment to the historical and established. Lash and Urry (1987) point out that aesthetic reflexivity increasingly informs both production and consumption. This might be interpreted as a threat to the idea of authentic consumption as ideas of aura and the appeals to universal experience become themselves

commodified. For the purposes of this project, though, the continuing existence of an ethic to consume, which is inspired by a search for experience and 'real' experience as judged by long-established notions of 'aura', remains interesting. The search for authenticity and the notion of being true to oneself, expressed through orientation to particular objects (in this case books), implies a survival of romantic notions of dissatisfaction with the world. This will be explored in the concluding section of this chapter that suggests the possibility of *work* not as a means of allowing consumption, but as a thing to be *consumed* itself.

Consuming work in a market for symbolic goods

"I suppose I just thought I'd be a customer who took money occasionally."¹

The preceding discussion has drawn from the considerable literature on the sociology of consumption to suggest ways in which the consuming self might not be as inherently unstable and uniquely contemporary as some theoretical accounts suggest. This suggests that the shift from modernity to post-modernity does not simply map on to a shift from production to consumption. In fact work and consumption can both be seen to intimately bound up with both modernity and post-modernity. Whilst it is arguable whether the same certainties surround work in the post-Fordist flexible service economy, people do still work and their identities or selves are intimately bound up with the work that they do. The aim of this section is to explore some of the ways in which work and consumption overlap and examine the extent to which work itself can be a thing to be *consumed*.

¹ Interview with bookshop worker 11/4/01. This worker was an English and Philosophy graduate who had worked in the same branch of a chain retailer for eleven years.

The narrative of change from work to consumption can be summarised as a shift of 'ethics', from 'Weberian' to, following Campbell, 'romantic'. Given that subjects are still both workers and consumers, this section explores the extent to which the romantic ethic, based around a personal quest for experience, authenticity and informed by aesthetic reflexivity, as well as cognitive reflexivity, might be relevant to the workplace. This draws upon ideas outlined in the preceding chapter about service work as a hybrid space that bridges the gap between work and consumption. For Bryman (1999), for example, workers in the service industries are required to work whilst not appearing to work. Their work becomes part of the process of consumption for others, a key aspect of which is not to remind customers of the world of work. Guerrier and Adib (2001) build on this by suggesting that in certain occupations (they use the example of tour reps on package holidays) expertise at work is defined by appearing to be a skilled consumer, a role model for customers. In the exploration of service work in the preceding chapter it was suggested that there was a tendency to emotional labour that might, in romantic terms compromise the possibility of authentic or fulfilled experience in the work place. Guerrier and Adib argue that front line workers are able to "resist the pains of production in the provision of emotional labour by initiating spaces and times for the pleasures of consumption." (Guerrier and Adib 2001:3)

There has been some useful sociological work that has explored the extent to which the boundaries between work and consumption are in fact blurred. The notion that we are 'different' selves when we work to when we consume is sociologically problematic, drawing on assumptions about the difference between the apparently public sphere of work and the apparently privatised world of consumption and leisure time. By contrast, writers have examined the ways in which workplace or public self informs the self in the private spheres of leisure and consumption and vice-versa. Nippen-Eng (1996), for example suggests that, rather than being separate spheres of human

experience, work and home can be thought of as complementary 'territories of the self', where through 'personalisation' of work spaces, through objects and practices, workers are able to shape institutional imperatives in the presentation of the self. In another complication, Moorhouse (1987) points out that, in the acquisition and performance of coherent masculine identities, the car workers he studied used their leisure time and consuming practices as a means of refining and even retaining skills from the factory in the care and maintenance of 'hot-rods'. The self at work can be seen to inform the self at leisure and vice-versa.

From a feminist perspective, the difference between work and home or public and private spheres is problematised by the fact that a good deal of domestic work is precisely based upon consumption, in the provision of food or clothing for a male breadwinner or for children (Game and Pringle 1984, Miller 1998). Finally, McDowell (1997) outlines the extent to which, for certain occupations, a high level of consumption was effectively a requirement for the job. Workers in her study of merchant bankers were required to spend considerable amounts of time and money on body maintenance, through style, grooming and exercise as a taken for granted aspect of their work role. This was based on an awareness of "the inseparability of their bodily performance from the product being sold." (McDowell 1997: 186)

All these accounts problematise the distinction between work and consumption. Of particular use in exploring bookshop work in this context is the notion of the 'aestheticisation' of labour which points to the ways in which the experience of work itself can be considered as aesthetic experience. An ethic of consumption might be applied to the workplace through the aesthetic judgement of the experience of work as worthwhile or authentic. The choice of occupation can, for some social groups, therefore be informed by similar kinds of criteria as the choice of consumer goods. Even if that choice is illusory or limited the experience of work can be judged according to aesthetic

criteria. Whereas historically, in a Weberian sense, all work might have been considered beneficial or worthwhile, in the contemporary context, some jobs might be judged as interesting, whilst others might be judged as dull.

Whilst the majority jobs, like consumer goods, may be unsatisfying and intrinsically shallow, for some, keen to rise above or separate themselves from this mass, work will required to be a further means of enriching the self. Bauman (1998) suggests this ability to select and treat jobs in this 'aesthetic' way is a feature of a privileged few. In a consumer society, he suggests, the only meaningful vocation is to consume, and to place too much of one's self to the whims of the flexible labour market is to place oneself under enormous psychic risk. Instead, whilst workers willingly enter into work and its arrangements, they judge the majority of jobs as aesthetically displeasing. They may play the game of being loyal and obedient but ultimately they distance themselves from their roles and save their energies for the more aesthetically pleasing, though equally untrustworthy, pleasures of consumption. For the privileged few, with access to the elevated professions, though, work is potentially experienced as pleasurable and the notion of vocation survives. This differs from historical vocation in that it is not based simply upon a belief in the work as linked to duty but judged according to the experiences, challenges and pleasures that it offers. For Bauman,

“The elevated professions call for the same qualities which are demanded for the appreciation of art – good taste, sophistication, discernment, disinterested dedication and a lot of schooling. Other types of work are regarded as so uniformly abject and worthless that by no stretch of the imagination can they become objects of willing, unforced choice.” (Bauman 1998: 33)

In most work contexts workers only tentatively invest of themselves in their work role and effectively re-affirm the distinction between work (where they

are in some sense constrained) and leisure (where they are apparently freer). For the 'elevated professions, though,

“the trick is no longer to limit work time to the bare minimum, so vacating more space for leisure but on the contrary to efface together the line dividing vocation from avocation, job from hobby, work from recreation: to lift work itself to the rank of the supreme and most satisfying entertainment.” (Bauman 1998: 34)

The idea of blurring the line between work and 'not work' is a particularly interesting one for the examination of the book trade and book shop workers. Much as the appreciation of culture was considered a different, more complex process than the consumption of goods, requiring particular orientations and aesthetic criteria, so the selling of books exists in a contradictory space between the artistic moment of creation and the moment of consumption. This thesis will attempt to expand the notion of work as an aesthetic experience to be consumed from the 'elevated' professions to the more apparently mundane world of service work in the retail book trade.

Whilst managerial accounts of the service workplace might privilege the extent to which work is fulfilling, or even 'fun', this kind of discourse is made problematic by the considerable literature on emotional labour and the 'colonising' of the workplace self. Despite this, this thesis will argue that, drawing on talk from book shop workers and from historical sources, work in the retail book trade is, in some sense, judged by workers according to aesthetic criteria which are, in part, inherited from romanticism. Rather than being simply colonised by managerial discourse about economic imperatives and emotionally manipulated, it will argue that workers use or consume the 'aura' of the book to distance themselves from certain aspects of their role. Inevitably there are contradictions and tensions in this process, around both

the employment relationship and the existence of books as commodities.
These tensions will be explored in the following chapters.

Chapter 3 Methods

The aim of this chapter is to outline the ways in which the abstract concepts of *self*, *society*, *production* and *consumption*, which have informed the preceding discussion, have been operationalised into this empirical project of a particular setting – the U.K retail book trade. I will begin by attempting to place the project within a tradition of social research, explaining what it draws and how it differs from this tradition in its methodological approach. A full descriptive account of the research design, the research process as well as a description of the process of analysis will follow this. The strengths and weaknesses of this type of work will be briefly explored along with a more in-depth exploration of the strengths and weaknesses of this particular project. The question of methodology is clearly a crucial one for sociology. The processes through which we pass are crucial to the generation of answers to the research questions we ask. Indeed, given recent sociological commitments to notions such as ‘reflexivity’, the research process and its effect on the researcher, as well as on the researched, can be argued as crucial parts of the answers we produce, as much as disinterested findings or raw data. It is, of course, beyond the scope of this limited empirical project to do justice to the complexities of these debates. It is, though, necessary to place this project methodologically as a means of justifying the choice of research approach.

As suggested in the previous reviews of the literature, some sociological accounts of the contemporary, late/post-modern world place particular emphasis on a process of change ordered around work, consumption and identity. This project is an attempt to explore the contradictions inherent in this narrative of change, based upon a particular setting – the book trade – and to suggest other possible narratives centred around the notion of the romantic self, realised through experiences of either work or consumption, and informed by competing rationalities (‘aesthetic’ or ‘cognitive’, following Lash &

Urry 1994) in the accumulation of occasionally contradictory types of capital (i.e. economic or cultural/symbolic following Bourdieu 1984, 1996), centred around the consumption – in the broadest sense – of symbolically important things. The project itself, then, exists in a contradictory space between grand theoretical narratives and the mundane limitations to a practical, empirical research project – be they temporal, geographical or financial, which this chapter will also outline.

Whilst it seeks to answer specific questions about the book trade setting, which will be explored later, the project also attempts to feed-back theoretically into these narratives, rather simply to use them as a tool to shape the questions and analysis. Particular epistemological and ontological debates involved in the operationalising of the project, such as how to study *work*, *consumption* and, perhaps most problematically, *the self* will be explored later. In producing accounts of the social world that claim to be valid, researchers are required to constantly reflect upon their methods and to ask a series of ‘how do we know questions?’ centred around the perennial methodological criteria of generaliseability, reliability and validity. Whilst these questions are typically related to the practical questions of how a project is operationalised, in this case, the first of these ‘how do we know?’ questions relates to these theoretical narratives themselves. How do we know that the contemporary self is ‘reflexive’, suffering from ontological insecurity or constituted in discourse? Simply because such eminent writers as Giddens (1991) or Bauman (1998) tell us they are, based upon largely intuitive rather than empirically grounded work?

The development of this research project has involved a process of initial acceptance of this narrative of change, replaced by scepticism about it. Reflexivity about the theories that underpin this work has been as crucial as reflexivity about methodological positions that have been taken. The temporal organisation of a thesis, around periods of research training, literature

reviewing, data collection and data analysis, produces pressures towards the tendency identified by Armstrong (2001) to produce a 'style of illusion' in qualitative work. Armstrong particularly identifies work concerned with the 'self', or 'individuality' or 'identity' as constituted in discourse and actively constructed rather than simply structural in origin. This type of work tends to treat its literature as "a source of authoritative reinforcement rather than, say of testable hypotheses or relevant empirical evidence." (Armstrong 2001:155) Thus we enter the field with a theoretical framework, which points us towards reflexive, discursive selves and using reflexive, discursive research methods (such as semi-structured interviews), we 'discover' selves who are discursive and reflexive. As Armstrong points out,

"by presenting an argument of this kind in advance of the ethnographic account an ambiguity is created, in which it is unclear whether the field data are to be regarded as a test of an hypothesis or merely as an illustration of an established phenomenon." (Armstrong 2001:156)

The following discussion will illustrate that this project, whilst recognising the limits to the possible truth of its findings, has focussed on the extent to which the phenomena outlined in the preceding discussion of literature are 'established' at all, through exploring the contradictions and tensions that they have generated in the research process.

Researching work and consumption in a culture industry

A key tension is the ontological certainty of the concepts of *work* and *consumption*, particularly as they relate to *the self*. As well as being located in the kind of theoretical traditions outlined in the preceding discussions, this project is also part of two rich traditions of sociological interest and inquiry concerned with examining the meanings and relationships associated with the workplace and consumption. The former has been central to the development of British sociology in particular, and the latter, whilst perhaps a more recent

interest to sociology, has its roots in anthropological accounts of the meaning of goods and a broad contemporary spectrum that touches on cultural and media studies, as well as the sociology of culture. Both these traditions of sociological inquiry have identity at their centre. There are assumptions that work and consumption are meaningful to agents involved in them. These meanings can be gleaned through observation and interaction, using the tools of qualitative and quantitative analysis. This project clearly shares these assumptions but attempts to challenge the certainty of these two categories of human experience as separate and discrete, particularly as they relate to the self. As the preceding discussion of work outlined, theoretical and empirical accounts of the workplace have focussed upon the ways in which work is a constraining or alienating aspect of human experience. In addition, they have emphasised the ways in which work is a site of struggle and resistance in which the self in the workplace has the potential to win victories over these structural constraints. Equally work about consumption has emphasised the symbolic nature of contemporary consumerism, its centrality to the construction of the contemporary self and its association with notions of social status and processes of distinction. Whilst both these traditions are, clearly, deeply relevant to a study of work in the symbolic economy of the book trade, this project also aims to problematise the notion of coherent working and coherent consuming selves and, instead, explore how the self (nominally the romantic self realised through experience and ambivalent to aspects of modernity) informs both these aspects of the lives of these workers. There is an inevitable element of reification in approaching any setting with such powerful concepts in mind. Work and consumption can be understood as elements of a broader Marxist metaphor of society in which all relations are at some level reduced to their proximity to processes of production. This metaphor is a useful starting point but this project also attempts to look at the spaces that selves inhabit which are outside these relationships and informed by processes not obviously connected to commodity production and

exchange. Work and consumption are important aspects of the contemporary self but they might not be the only aspects.

Structural constraints can be experienced as banal or mundane in the day-to-day workplace and so the reification of the workplace and workplace resistance can be seen to assume the existence of a coherent internal work based self. Kondo (1990) stresses the extent to which the self is a far from coherent construction but rather a series of assertions that alter according to the physical setting. She suggests,

“the identity of the subject is multiple, produced within discourse and potentially contradictory and though there can be a ‘temporary retrospective fixing’ of meaning and identity, no ready form of coherence can be posited in advance.” (Kondo 1990:36)

The tendency to treat work as a separate, distinct, sphere of human activity ignores the complexity of work in the contexts of the everyday lives of workers. Agents at work are required to act out a number of roles at the same time. One may be required to be obedient and disciplined, enthusiastic and innovative in relations with one’s superiors, whilst appearing aloof and cynical whist with one’s peers. Add to these layers of performance the presence of an inquiring sociologist and workplace selves become increasingly hard to ‘see’ sociologically.

Similarly, ‘consumption’ is difficult to speak of a singular, coherent thing. It varies enormously between the mundane consumption of the apparent necessities of life and the more spectacular consumption of symbolic things (both of which have been of interest to sociology and anthropology and inherent in the preservation and ordering of social structures). Neither, though, can be adequately summarised simply through observation of the ‘things’ and the processes of commodification and exchange. This approach is identified and criticised by Baudrillard as ‘garbage-can’ sociology – “tell me

what you throw away and I'll tell you what you are." (Baudrillard 1998:42) The definition of consumption that informs much of sociological work in this area is not one that stops at economic exchange. Rather than being 'the act of buying' consumption can be constructed as a social fact or orientation to the world. In Campbell's (1987) terms it is an 'ethic' that centres upon the realisation of the self. Thus we don't simply consume when we are shopping but orient ourselves to 'things' as part of the discursive formation of the self. The consumption of books is a site with a number of resonances and meanings – the histories of which will be explored in Chapter Five. In terms of designing a project about the ways in which bookshop workers 'consume' books and bookshop work, these complexities are important to recognise. Whilst there are moments of economic exchange in the process of book consumption, there are other ways in which books are consumed. 'Garbage can' consumption implies destruction, whereas, given the extent to which the purchase of books is often caught up with notions of display that resonate with the accumulation of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) and 'aura' (Benjamin 1999), book-buying can be seen as an act of preservation. For workers in this industry, work with such objects becomes an act of association – of consuming the cultural capital and aura of the things they sell. The way that workers in the book industry talk about what they do can therefore be examined from a perspective of consumption in its broadest sense.

The books that bookshop workers are interested in provide some interesting insights. The details of the employment relationships in the work-place and worker's feelings about them similarly help ground this inquiry and point towards the 'experience' of bookshop work. The focus of this project though is not on 'how' workers work and how workers, as consumers, consume. Rather it uses the apparently discrete areas of work and consumption as a means of generating narratives from respondents about their selves. Work and consumption are not seen in this project as separate things, rather they exist as part of what Giddens (1984) terms the 'durée' of social life, or what

Hochschild terms 'the jazz of human exchange' (Hochschild 1983:79) – apparently distinct but actually interactive and overlapping areas of human experience. The project uses the possibility of work being 'consumed' and how that notion fits with the preceding narrative of change is explored. The retail sector clearly represents a place where work and consumption are spatially linked. If work and consumption are competing resources for the construction of contemporary late/post-modern selves, then what does this mean for workers in this hybrid space? Retail offers a particular space where this narrative of change can be challenged. The book trade, with its particular histories and tensions, offers another layer of complexity to this inquiry.

The construction of the book trade as 'different' became, as the following discussion of the process of analysis will demonstrate, a central theme for this inquiry, informing how workers felt about their work. The difference has a number of dimensions but can, in part, be attributed to the perception of this work as somehow relating to questions of 'culture' rather than to questions of commerce. This distinction is, of course, a result of social and historical processes, which this thesis will also explore and so, there is a need, in approaching this data and this field, to avoid the uncritical reproduction of this difference. 'Culture' is a complex word, which, particularly in the light of managerial perspectives focussing on workplace 'cultures' must be used with caution. Whilst sociology and cultural studies have contributed to the problematising of culture as a coherent category of activity it remains a meaningful one that informs aspects of policy and, importantly for this thesis, views of the self. Agents still use 'culture', in an Arnoldian sense of the best that is thought and said, as a narrative device through which they frame and give meaning to their actions. Whilst the sociology of culture and the cultural studies tradition have traditionally cast this Arnoldian view of culture as, at best old fashioned, and, at worst elitist, it did stem, along with the writings of the romantic movement, from a critique of prevailing social relations under capitalism and the rational, utilitarian market place in particular. In the study of

retail and other branches of economic sociology, processes of cultural production are understood as deeply embedded in more general processes of production and vice-versa. All types of human activity can be seen through the lens of culture. This complexity makes the study of the cultural industries difficult, as what researchers mean by culture and what respondents mean by culture may be two, or more, different things. This requires careful design of research questions, which make reflexive use of theoretical perspectives to make the inquiry meaningful to those involved in it. The following section gives a descriptive account of some of the research questions and methodological choices that this attempt at a reflexive use of theory has led to.

The research design – ‘choosing’ the field

As suggested earlier, there are question marks over the ability of this kind of work to produce valid, reliable and generalisable findings. The avoidance of reification, of either work or consumption, necessarily lends itself to discursive research approaches, though this has dangers of finding what one is looking for. This may be an unavoidable aspect of research of this type, that is tempered somewhat by the aim of the research not just to find things out or provide concrete answers to empirical questions (though these are two aims) but to explore and examine the contradictions and inconsistencies in the working lives of people in this field. The aim of the project, its research methods and analysis, was not simply to, in Plummer's (1983) terms, impose order and coherence onto lives of respondents in this setting (though this is arguably an inevitable process of any social research that extends beyond documentary representation) but to use talk of respondents to illuminate the experience of work in this industry and to use the inconsistencies evident in this talk as a means of questioning theoretical assumptions and narratives.

This required a combination of methodological approaches, centred on bookshop workers.

The choice of field and the generation of a sample of respondents were particularly important. Social research of this kind is always balancing what the researcher would like to do with the practical requirements of completion of a project that is manageable within a particular time-scale. This inevitably requires, and results in, selectivity and compromise in the research design. This is complicated by certain ontological issues around what constitutes a bookshop and what constitutes a bookshop worker. The process of selection of which field to pursue was informed by ease of access negotiation, a quest for both manageable and generalisable sample and a desire for variety in terms of levels of experience of work in this sector and managerial seniority. It was also informed by my own experiences as a worker in this sector in a major chain bookseller. These experiences in particular led me to narrow my search for a generalisable field to workers and managers in chain bookshops. The particularities of employment relationships in these types of working environments will be explored more fully later but chain booksellers seemed to represent the field in which some of the tensions and contradictions of interest to this thesis were most obviously manifested. They are, for example, large, centralised, rational organisations driven by commercial imperatives, which operate in a market for symbolic goods. The workers in this industry are required to orient themselves to the things that they sell in the day-to-day exposition of their role. They are expected to exhibit enthusiasm and knowledge of the things that they sell, much as they are in other contemporary corporate workplaces. They also tend to be people of a high level of educational capital – graduates and even post-graduates (my own time as a bookshop worker coincided with work on a Masters degree by research and thesis) who work for low wages typical of the retail sector. In this sense they could be seen as typical contemporary service workers, colonised by managerial discourses of self-discipline and entrepreneurialism,

such as those described by du Gay (1996) or Casey (1995). Also, through the short-term contracts and flexibility again typical of the retail sector, workers were deprived of long-term economic or, tellingly, 'ontological' security and were arguably, thus, the very picture of 'reflexive' selves. This thesis does not reject this typicality but attempts to suggest a more subtle or complex narrative in which these types of insecurity at work do not map so simply onto insecure selves. Whilst the perception within the book trade was of short-termism, the actual experiences of many of my respondents suggested that people stayed for longer in these jobs than the notion of flexibility might suggest.

The choice of the chain bookseller did, of course, exclude important sectors of the book trade, particularly from a symbolic perspective. The antiquarian book trade and second hand book trade both evoke the idea of books as 'treasure' to be discovered and preserved that resonate with the notion of 'aura'. Similarly, the presence of books in supermarkets and remaindered bookshops (where stock is bought in by weight) point more strongly to the 'commoditiness' of books rather than to their cultural or romantic resonances. Independent bookshops evoke yet more meanings – 'independence' implies 'not corporate', which in contemporary discourse points to diversity, even proximity to notions of community. These meanings will be explored in full in the following chapter but they strongly informed the choice of what type of bookshop to look at and, together with my experience as a bookshop worker, what type of bookshop worker to talk to.

When I began this thesis I wanted it to be a project about 'booksellers' – a term I used to describe myself, my colleagues and a term used by firms to describe their shop based workers. Throughout the analysis of this work I have chosen to use the term 'bookshop worker' or 'bookshop manager' as a means of avoiding some etymological confusion. The term 'bookseller' is itself particularly problematic in a study of the book trade and itself represents an

ontological problem. Bookshop workers of varieties of levels of seniority and experience referred to themselves and to their fellow workers as 'booksellers'. What a 'bookseller' is though has been something of a contested term, to the extent that referring to my respondents as bookshop workers clarifies precisely to whom I refer. Historically 'booksellers' were publishers, printers and booksellers with all the resonances that these numerous roles evoke. More recently 'bookseller' has come to mean 'the person who stands behind the counter in a bookshop' but this in itself gives no clue to the status of the individual. As I shall demonstrate in the analysis of talk with respondents, a key aspect of their occupational identity was their difference from workers in other sectors of retail. The use of the term bookseller by bookshop workers then becomes part of a process of distinction. My rejection of this term for analysis is not to question the validity of this occupational identity but to avoid the tacit acceptance of this distinction, given the similarities between bookshop work and other retail work. 'Bookseller' is also a term used within the trade to mark boundaries between sectors (i.e., publisher, distributor, bookseller) and so within the trade press is used as a term to mean 'book selling firm'. The Booksellers' Association, for example, is not an example of organised labour supporting bookshop workers, but a trade association of book selling firms. The trade journal, *The Bookseller*, works more as a business news service for the industry as a whole, including publishing. Whilst the bookshop workers upon which this project is focussed are occasionally represented in this journal (examples of this representation will be included in later chapters) its subject matter, in terms of individual trade workers, tends towards publishing, the directorial level of bookselling chains, or the owners of independent bookshops. 'Bookshop worker' or 'bookshop manager' as terms of analysis puts the focus primarily on the experience of working in a bookshop as the central interest of this project.

The choice of research methods and the negotiation of access were both important to the eventual make-up of the 'sample'. The typicality of the retail

book trade as a corporate employer means that employees are not unfamiliar with the idea of being consulted about their feelings about their work roles. Staff surveys and personal appraisals are important tools of the contemporary manager and, as writers such as Grey (1994) and Ezzy (2001) point out, important tools of managerial control. In terms of researching this workplace this focus on the 'self' from a management perspective is double-edged.

For ethical reasons, it was felt to be important that I was open about my aims and objectives in researching the trade. This thesis is not a critique of the firms in the retail book trade as employers. Nor is it an attempt to assess the relative success of different firms. Rather it is an exploration of the tensions that emerge in the employment relationship in a symbolic economy, how these tensions are managed and what they mean in the context of broader theoretical explanations of the contemporary service workplace. With this ethical question in mind, access negotiation was initially carried out at the level of the firm. Managerial concern with the well being of workers (whether this is rhetorical or not) allowed me to represent my research in terms that were readily accessible. It also allowed me to suggest the ways it could be useful to an employer to get a sense of how bookshop workers and managers felt about what they did. One of the four firms I initially approached, though, pointed out that as they already did staff consultation, additional research of this nature would be unnecessary. Another did express a similar concern over duplication, but was still persuaded to take part at the discretion of local managers.

'Duplication' was also an issue for respondents themselves. Drawing on my own experiences of bookshop work and initial conversations with my former manager, I was aware of the cynicism with which managerial research into staff motivations and concerns was often greeted. Staff consultation surveys were typified by low response rates and a belief that results were untrustworthy and rarely acted upon. This was an added motivation to

qualitative interview methods – to mark this inquiry out as, in some sense, ‘different’.

Going into this field with what was tantamount to managerial approval meant that workers and local managers could see me as a representative of management or corporate head offices – a position which could have possibly discouraged involvement and skewed responses towards what management/head office would want to hear. These types of pressures were taken into consideration in analysing responses and, within the interviews themselves, they were mitigated through stressing confidentiality and assuring the anonymity of both firms and respondents. In the two firms where the majority of the research was undertaken, initial directorial contact was followed by the insertion of a brief summary of the project into a firm circular, inviting volunteers. The aim of this was to off-set the risk of respondents feeling coerced into being involved in the project in an attempt to minimise the inevitable ‘inventedness’ of the context of their talk. Ultimately this approach was unsuccessful and didn’t attract respondents. It was followed by local negotiation with bookshop managers, building upon the permission granted by head offices. This was far more successful and formed the means by which the majority of responses were generated. An early pattern was established whereby access negotiation would take place with a local shop manager (largely based within easy travelling distance – i.e. within the East and West Midlands), during which they would agree to be interviewed themselves and to allow me to interview a member of their staff, to be decided upon the day of my visit. Whilst the danger that this could again compromise the validity of the sample, the decision was taken not to push for the opportunity to choose my own respondent or to ask for volunteers in each shop. It was made clear in most cases that my presence was a drain on limited resources and that my time with respondents, both managers and workers, was already limited. Most interviews took place within the workplace. Others were undertaken during lunch hours or immediately after the

respondent had finished work. Adding complications to this process would have been self-defeating. Whilst there was a possibility that respondents were chosen by managerial staff for their uncontroversial views on their firm or their shop, generally the impression was that the choice was determined by who was free or less busy during the times of my visits. Whilst this possibility was taken into consideration in the analysis of responses, given the range of critical accounts given of the experiences of bookshop work, there was no evidence of direct managerial manipulation of respondents at all.

This approach to access negotiation did result in rather more responses than anticipated from the 'managerial' level of firms. Initially this was mitigated in the research design by the construction of separate interview schedules for 'managers' and 'workers' with slightly different focuses. It quickly became apparent in the process of the research that the concerns and experiences of both these sets of respondents were, in the terms of the project, very similar, not least because managers tended to be former workers. None of the bookshop managers I spoke to came from other types of retail. They had all begun their bookshop work careers as shop floor workers. These separate schedules were not abandoned but used reflexively – so that both managers and workers could comment on the differences and similarities between them.

The research design – planning the interviews

Given the restricted time allowed with many respondents, considerable importance was placed upon the ways in which the interviews were structured. Too much structure would be to impose an order on the interaction that would reduce the possibility of the kind self reflection required to answer the theoretical level of inquiry, whereas too little might compromise the possibility of generating meaningful empirical data about the particular experience of work in this field. A balance was struck between getting

respondents to talk about themselves and getting them to talk about their *sel/ves* in the context of bookshop work. The thesis was designed to be qualitative, in both its research and in the analysis of its data. Whilst concrete biographical data, such as age, length of experience, gender, place of interview was important to record, the trends and patterns drawn from this kind of data were not assumed to be central to the analysis. Rather, the stories that people told around these facts about themselves were used to reflect back upon theoretical assumptions.

The questions asked fell into three main areas that were designed to strike this balance. The questions were generated through reflection upon my own experiences of bookshop work, initial discussions with former colleagues, and through reflection upon the history of the book trade and through analysis of the contemporary trade press and representations of bookshop work, including autobiographies of book trade figures. This latter source was a particularly rich one that will be discussed in greater length later. Whilst my own experiences allowed me insight into particular frustration and tensions within the trade and were advantageous in allowing a degree of shared experience between researcher and respondents, it was felt to be dangerous to rely on this completely in generating questions. Whilst this experience certainly eased the process of access negotiation, the use of other sources in the generation of questions was helpful in marking the discursive terrain of this inquiry and allowing me to use current and past book trade concerns identified in these sources as a way into discussing sociological concerns.

The two initial schedules followed a similar pattern. Both began with questions relating to the respondents' personal history and career experience, designed to elicit both concrete biographical experiences and narratives about career and educational experience. With these initial questions, respondents were asked to reflect upon the context of bookshop work in the narrative of their own career, including how they came to this work place,

what their personal ambitions were and how long they saw themselves staying. They were asked to reflect upon the process of becoming a bookshop worker, including the process of application and interview, and on other fields of employment that they had considered or attempted to enter. For those with ambitions to move on, the types of job they wanted were explored. As well as establishing a narrative context, the responses to these questions became an important resource in problematising the notion of choice in employment that feeds into discussions of identity at work. These questions were also used to establish initial thoughts about the experience of bookshop work that were built upon in the next section. This was done through asking respondents to reflect upon their choice of bookshop work and whether they would have considered other types of retail or service work. This generated responses addressing the issue of the distinction of bookshop work from general retail.

This discussion was linked to a more in-depth inquiry about the particular experience of bookshop work. A series of questions were asked that was designed to allow respondents to reflect upon their perceptions of bookshop work before they began their period of employment and whether or not the reality of the experience of this work fitted their expectations. These questions were intended to elicit responses about the respondents' own orientation to the product and to explore further the distinction of bookshop work from other types of selling and the place of this distinction in the experience of this workplace. Initially the questions asked of managers were slightly different in emphasis, in that they were asked to reflect both upon their own experiences and upon their perceptions of the experiences of their staff in managing the shift from enthusiastic consumers of books to enthusiastic sellers of them. This allowed the exploration of the issue of the usefulness of the orientation of workers and managers to the products that they were engaged in selling and the discussion of the possible tensions that emerge in this. Managers were also asked to reflect upon the ideal bookshop worker and what characteristics

and skills were important in an individual engaged in this work. Particular emphasis in this discussion was again placed on the importance of enthusiasm or love for books, the extent to which these emotional attachments were important in the working role and how, if at all, they were managed.

Both sets of respondents, as part of this section of inquiry, were asked to reflect upon a particular quote from a 'textbook' of bookselling written in 1974 by Thomas Joy, former chairman of Hatchard's and president of The Bookseller's Association.

"Bookselling is more than a trade - it is a vocation. Bookshops do more than meet demand they create it and thus are vital to the cultural welfare of the community." (Joy 1974:61)

This quote was used to allow respondents to reflect upon the source of this kind of view of bookshop work and to allow them to compare it with their own view of their work and their emotional engagement with it. It was also used to encourage respondents to reflect upon how they felt bookshop work was regarded as a career choice and whether they felt they were engaged in a respected occupation. This particular question evoked the most discussion of any in the whole of the schedule, to the extent that, in later bookshop visits, if I had been made aware that time was a particular factor, it became a starting point for the interview. In initial talk with workers, this question tended to produce responses that explored the tension between the 'aura' of the book as an object, the romantic perceptions of bookshop work and the quotidian or mundane aspects of it. In talk with managers there was a tendency to stress 'the community' aspects of the quotation, as a means of illustrating the conceptual distinction between work in a bookshop and work in another type of retail. For both types of respondent these discussions led to questions about the transferability of bookshop work skills to other types of work, specifically other types of retail and the desirability of such a change. Both

sets of respondents picked up on the datedness of the quotation, which allowed for exploration of narratives of change.

In the initial interview schedules, the final section of discussion was the most markedly different. Talk with managers was initially intended to focus specifically on narratives of change within the retail book trade, whilst talk with workers focussed on specific discussion of the employment relationship. Early on in the process of data collection, though, this distinction was abandoned as responses from managers tended towards reproduction of general, trade-level discourses, such as the rise of the internet or the end of the Net Book Agreement. Whilst this discussion was interesting (and was put to use in Chapter Six) it led the focus away from the particular experience of bookshop work. The initial distinction between schedules can also perhaps be explained by hesitancy on my part to broach sensitive issues around manager-worker relationships and the management of conflict in the workplace with managers themselves. This timidity was quickly overcome and was helped by the interesting discovery that all of the managers I spoke to had themselves been workers at some stage in their book trade careers. In fact none of the managers that I spoke to had any experience in any other form of retail. Perceptions and experiences of change were explored with both workers and managers, with the emphasis being upon whether or not broader changes in the book trade had, or would, impact upon the role of the bookshop in general and the bookshop worker in particular.

The discussion in this section focussed upon the day-to-day aspects of bookshop, in terms of organisation of workers and activities. A particular emphasis was placed upon discussion of training, the processes of consultation between central head offices, managers and workers and the level of 'input' that workers felt they had in the broader commercial organisation. This was intended to produce responses around the possibility of autonomy and creativity in the bookshop worker's role that related to both

the broader theoretical debates about 'the self' and notions of self-fulfilment and to questions around rationalisation within the workplace. In terms of training, the focus was upon whether or not it was possible to be a good bookshop worker without a knowledge or enthusiasm or love for the 'product' (itself a contested term in this context). The possibility of 'training' for a love of books was explored. Discussions of worker input was focussed on the granting of the authority to buy in stock for shops and the extent to which this was based upon the acquisition of technical skills of stock management, or more concerned with the creative expression of enthusiasm to the good of the shop. The prestige and feelings of personal fulfilment involved in these processes was also approached and also the extent to which individual expertise or interest in an area was put to work by the firms. The rationale behind a recent bookshop phenomenon of 'staff recommendations' was explored with respondents being asked to reflect on the experiences of producing such promotional material and the possible tensions that might emerge from this. The nature of the relationship between bookshop workers and customers was examined in this section of the interview schedule. 'Staff recommendations' suggested a role for the worker in shaping the tastes of consumers. The attraction of this role and its limitations were also discussed.

The specifics of the employment relationship were examined by questioning both managers and workers about their experiences of bookselling firms as employers. These questions were about formal processes of handling grievances or discipline but were designed to lead into a broader discussion of how the workplace is 'managed'. This was built upon through discussion of organised labour within the book trade and whether or not workers or managers were members of unions, or were aware of the existence of a union for bookshop workers. This was a topic that again provoked particularly interesting responses from both workers and managers that fed off discussions within the trade press about this issue. These trade press discussions were used as a way into this sensitive topic, particularly in

discussion with managers and directors of firms. These discussions led into specific questions about pay and conditions in the workplace and whether or not bookshop workers felt themselves to be 'exploited'. A negative reply to this particular question was not necessarily taken as evidence that they were not or vice-versa. As we shall see in the analysis of the responses, such answers were not used to establish 'facts' about a particular aspect of this workplace, but to explore how workers and managers made sense of their experiences of this setting.

The interview schedules were not followed rigorously in every interview and they were developed as the collection process gathered momentum and my own confidence and awareness of the questions developed. Equally the pattern of data collection and access negotiation was also deviated from. As well as the main firm level, formal process of sample generation, several respondents were attracted through less formal means. I was able to use my time as a bookshop worker to address a staff training session at my former employer. This generated three interviews. Contact with the main book trade journal resulted in an article about the research appearing along with my contact details. This resulted in one further interview and e-mail and telephone correspondents. Finally, attendance at the annual Booksellers' Association conference in 2002 allowed for the collection of a great deal of industry level data and observation of a 'break out session' on 'Retention and Recruitment' of bookshop staff. Contacts made at this session produced two further interviews and a number of informal conversations that were recorded through field notes. My research happily coincided with an industry wide debate about the 'de-professionalisation' of 'bookselling' (i.e. bookshop work) which produced interesting data from 'round table' plenary session discussion of prominent book trade figures, including the managing director of one of the firms which provided the bulk of my interview data.

The research design – other resources, other ‘respondents’

Whilst the sample taken is small given the size of the potential field, interview data was augmented through the use of historical sources. The purpose of this was two-fold. Firstly, it allowed for a broader context for the kinds of change that respondents were articulating and a more authoritative claim to knowledge of the field. Secondly, it allowed access to *continuities*, particularly around tensions between cultural and commercial meanings associated with books and around ideological questions surrounding the production and consumption of books as symbolically important things. This type of historical material is explored more fully in later chapters and includes discussion of the auto-didacticism movement (Vincent 1981), the rise of the book club (Radway 1997) and its association with notions of the circulation of good taste (Rubin 1992). Most useful of these sources were a number of autobiographies and memoirs written by prominent book trade figures.

These sources provided a means of refining research questions and helping to mark out the discursive terrain of the field and, initially, this was to be their primary use. In this sense the approach was similar to that suggested by Plummer (1983) in the typical use of such ‘histories’ by social research, in that they

“will either have to be viewed as a preliminary stage of knowledge development whereby hunches can be generated, ideas formulated and hypotheses set up before the more critical stage of formal testing is reached, or they will have to be rendered quantifiable.” (Plummer 1983:120)

In terms of this project though, the critical or more formal mode of inquiry is clearly lacking, at least as defined as strict, rigorously followed methodological approaches. Rather a more informal, discursive approach to data gathering was necessary to operationalise the subtle theoretical questions. Thus, in some sense, the authors of these texts can also be raised

to the level of respondents, in that, as well as shaping research questions, these sources have also gone some way towards answering them.

The use of biographical and autobiographical sources has a long and controversial history in social research. The use of the published autobiography of a prominent figure has particular problems in terms of generalisability, reliability and validity. Using the account of an individual's life as data is clearly problematic, given the difference between the subjective experience of an individual and sociology's more general concern with how 'the social' objectively impacts upon individuals. Recent work, based around autobiographical documents (e.g. Stanley 1984), has overcome this by suggesting that the aim is not to accurately produce an objective account of the social world but to reflect the subjective view of the social world squeezed out by methodological concerns with the 'general' and theoretical concerns with social process and structure. The concern with biographical and autobiographical methods that inspired the special edition of *Sociology* produced in 1993 was drawn from both a broad challenge to both the re-emergence of 'positivism' on the one hand and disenchantment with the 'meta-theorising' of post modernism on the other. In place of these perspectives, it attempts to give "the particular, rather than the general a new place in theoretical explanation." (Evans 1993:5) This kind of approach represents a re-assertion of C. Wright Mills' (1970) description of sociology concerning itself with the intersection between life-experience, history and social structure.

The difficulties around the use of published autobiographies of prominent figures in a particular field relate to issues of power and representation. As Dorothy Sheridan (1993) points out, the feminist concern with giving a voice to previously under-'written' lives that inspired recent uses of 'autobiographical' sources was a reaction to the fact that,

“the decision to write a full ‘whole’ life story, that is, one with a chronological narrative which takes the reader from birth to later in life, through life-events and transitions in a journey of self-improvement, has been, historically in the Western tradition, a cultural choice utilised predominantly by male writers.”
(Sheridan 1993:31)

More specifically published autobiographies tend to be produced by either the most powerful or the most articulate members of a particular field. This is clearly complicated in the book trade through the proximity of these figures to the means of production, both material and intellectual. The motivation to write such a text, in this instance, can be vanity, self-aggrandisement or the belief, of both author and publisher that the life recounted is, in some sense, significant. In the production of this text, then, the author is clearly in a very powerful position to re-present his or her life, to valorise achievements and excuse or simply omit failures. In terms of access to some notion of objective truth, then, the published autobiography is doubly untrustworthy. It is the product of a powerful figure and it is a selective and subjective interpretation of events in the construction of a meaningful narrative. What it also represents though, as Sheridan points out, is a means of gaining privileged access “into a dimension of human reality, which would be difficult to access through other means. Through autobiography we may come to learn about people’s hopes and fears, their individual choice in relation to wider social and political change, their rational and unconscious motives for acting and the meanings and significance which they give to their lives.” (Sheridan 1993:28) This is a particularly useful way of thinking about this type of evidence for a thesis about the processes surrounding the construction of ‘selves’.

Autobiographies are not used to establish the facts about a particular phenomenon, rather they should be interpreted as a means of assessing how the author’s view of the world is informed by the social and cultural milieu in which he or she lived or lives. This is similar to treatment given to data drawn from more apparently formal research methods. Interview data was not simply

accepted at face value but interpreted in the context of the empirical concerns of the project and its theoretical framework. This inevitably involves a selective treatment of the material that attempts to draw out meaningful narrative. Interview respondents for example had a tendency to contradict themselves or to give conflicting or ambiguous accounts of their experiences of bookshop work. Some said, often within the space of a few answers, for example, that bookshop work was 'different' from other types of retail and they wouldn't consider themselves 'shopworkers' and that bookshop work was just like other types of retail and, at the end of the day, they were 'just salespeople'. In terms of the establishment of 'facts' about a particular phenomenon such responses are equally untrustworthy. In terms of exploring the contradictions inherent in the discursive construction of the self, though, they are useful findings in themselves. As Plummer suggests, "researchers seek consistency in subjects' responses when subjects lives are often inconsistent." (Plummer 1983:68)

The act of interpretation is precisely an act of construction – a process of constructing narrative from occasionally competing or even conflicting discourses. In using qualitative evidence of these types the aim is not simply to recreate what respondents tell us. Rather, these 'stories' inform new stories about the social world. As suggested previously, the ability to write an autobiography, the motivation to write one and the means to have one published are all informed by social factors which, if tests of methodological validity are met, must be revealed or accounted for in analysis. Whilst the autobiographies used in this analysis have been written exclusively by powerful figures within the field, they remain useful ways of illustrating and clarifying research questions and provide useful data for answering them. As Evans suggests, autobiographies are also written to mark the end of a career. In this respect writing an autobiography can be seen as performing an act of control over a social world which is in some sense slipping away. Authors are no longer 'making their lives' or making themselves. Rather they are telling

stories about the ways in which they were made. In this respect autobiographical texts are again similar to interviews in which respondents don't simply provide facts about their lives but represent themselves. Whilst interview respondents are liable to inconsistency and contradiction, the published autobiography has the potential to provide a clear but contested narrative of the broader social forces at work in the production of the self. Given the contested nature of people's accounts of their own lives, the inconsistencies of social experience and the need for sociology to bring order to these in the production of meaningful narrative, the appeal of autobiographical resources is that they help mark the discursive terrain of a field and, more importantly perhaps, "provide models of people who knew what they were doing." (Evans 1993:12)

The process of analysis

The evidence upon which this thesis is based then, comes from the talk from respondents in interviews, the autobiographical material drawn from written accounts of the experience of the book trade drawn from figures involved in publishing and retail and the data drawn from the trade press (from a twelve month sample of issues of the major trade magazine *The Bookseller*). Whilst these sources are all equally rich in generating evidence of the discursive terrain of the book trade, given the focus of this research on questioning some more specific and contemporary theoretical discourses, the interview data was given particular prominence in terms of organising the analysis. Temporally the organisation of this thesis meant that I entered the interview process having spent some time studying and drawing themes from historical and autobiographical sources, as well as keeping up to date with contemporary trade debates via the trade press. In this respect, these types of material, along with my own experiences of the retail book trade, were allowed to 'generate hunches' and to inform the structure of the interviews. Once the material was gathered, though, it was important not to let this

structure inform the analysis of the material in a restrictive way – to avoid the style of illusion identified by Armstrong – and to allow the talk of respondents to reflect back upon and inform the theoretical understandings of the workplace and the historical constructions of the book trade.

In designing the interview schedule the three themes of the personal history of the respondent, the experience of bookshop work and the specifics of the employment relationship allowed for a focussed discussion that reflected the temporal constraints on researcher and respondents. In analysing the data in the context of the 'other respondents' (historical, autobiographical and trade press) these themes were broadened out. The interview transcripts were analysed manually (i.e. without the use of computer packages, using multiple highlighting to indicate the relevance of a particular aspect of talk to a particular theme). An initial reading of all the transcripts was used to identify broader themes. Whilst these reflected the structure of the interview schedule it was considered important for other themes, which had not been specifically present in this schedule, but which recurred in talk with respondents, to be identified and developed.

Six themes were identified. Firstly, talk about personal questions of biography was grouped together. This included information about educational background and length of service within the trade. Information such as this was used to indicate the extent to which the respondents had accrued levels of cultural capital, which may have affected their particular orientation to their work. Level of experience was used to assess the extent to which workers and managers could be seen to have knowledge of broader debates within the retail book trade and to position themselves within the discursive terrain of book trade work. It was also clearly an indicator of the speed of turnover of staff. Secondly, more reflexive kind of talk about personal narratives was grouped under a theme concerning 'the self'. This grouped together talk which concerned aspirations in terms of developing a career and the place of

the experience of bookshop work in that. This talk was examined in the light of theoretical questions with personal authenticity and self-discipline and development. It also concerned questions of emotional labour and of perceptions of the possibility of 'genuine' engagement with bookshop work. Thirdly, talk was collected together which addressed perceptions and representations of bookshop work. In particular respondents' accounts of the difference of bookshop work from other kinds of retail and the meanings that informed this difference were collated. These kinds of talk were used to examine distinctions between work and consumption and explore theoretical ideas, such as the aestheticisation of labour and the possibility of aesthetic reflexivity. Talk about representations, in particular, generated some interesting data, with several respondents referring in their talk to stereotypes of bookshop work and to popular narratives of the book trade as a particular form of capitalism. These are explored more fully in the following chapter.

Representations and perceptions were developed in the fourth theme, which focussed on the respondents' attitudes to books themselves. There were two elements to this. Firstly, respondents mentioned specific titles and authors whom they liked and disliked. This kind of information was helpful in assessing respondents' own orientation to literature and reading as markers of cultural capital and distinction and their own relative expertise in this area. Secondly, the emotional responses to books and talk about books in general, as particular and distinct types of objects, was collated together and examined in the theoretical context of Benjamin's (1999) aura. Talk such as this also helped explore the tension around the self, informed by notions of romanticism. A key element of the romantic self is its ambivalence to the market place and to modernity. Workers' talk about the uniqueness of books as commodities, the agency of books as objects and their own emotional engagement with books were all used to explore and illustrate this ambivalence.

Tensions around the commodity status of books were also explored in the fifth theme, which gathered together talk about changes in the industry, real or perceived. These responses gathered informational data from workers who had experience such changes as the rise of the chains, the end of the Net Book Agreement, the centralisation and rationalisation of processes of stock control involving new technology, the rise of the internet and the effect of these on the experience of bookshop work. In particular, this kind of talk was used to examine theoretical narratives about the status of the culture industries, informed by Bourdieu's (1996) model of the contested autonomy of the literary field.

Finally the sixth theme examined some specific tensions in the employment relationship and the experience of bookshop work. Here, talk was gathered around questions of monetary reward and other types of reward (such as autonomy, responsibility and the possibility of 'self-expression'). Relationships between management and workers were explored in order to assess the processes by which this kind of workplace is managed and the means by which conflicts at work are experienced and understood. This talk helped to explore contemporary narratives in the sociology of work, including emotional labour and the place of the subjectivity of workers in the employment relationship. Relationships with customers were also explored in this theme. Talk that related to positive or negative relationships to customers was examined to assess the place of the retail worker (and the bookshop worker in particular) in the construction of the autonomous contemporary consumer. The ways in which bookshop workers talked about customers was examined in the light of theoretical debates connecting consumption with the formation and definition of social groups.

These six themes helped to organise wide-ranging and disparate material into a manageable form that allowed the generation of a narrative structure for the exploration of both broad theoretical themes and empirical questions. There is

some degree of overlap between these themes but the talk generated by bookshop workers (through interviews, designed through reference to historical and autobiographical sources, as well as contemporary trade press sources) informed the interpretation of this empirical setting. History, autobiography and trade discourses were also used to augment this interview data in the following chapters, beginning with questions of perception and representation of the book industry and bookshop work.

Chapter 4 'Grocers Who Dream'. Perceptions and representations of books and bookshops

"A grocer who dreams is offensive to the buyer because such a grocer is not wholly a grocer." Sartre (1959:59)

The aim of this chapter is to build upon themes identified in the preceding discussion about production and consumption and begin to place them within the book trade and its audience. In particular it will focus on the idea of the book trade as a 'different' kind of commercial environment, informed by discourses which implicate books as part of a process of defining a distinct kind of relationship to the social world. This chapter will focus upon this specific question of the distinctiveness of the book trade by considering some perceptions and representations of the relationship of the producers and consumers of books to books as *objects*. As suggested in Chapter Two, contemporary ideas of the self are intertwined with notions of ownership. Sociological accounts of consumption have stressed the extent to which the manipulation of consumer goods has become a central source for the construction of a self set free from, or robbed of, the certainties of the modern era. Relationships to objects are also seen to have particular histories and connections to the formations of group identities. McCracken's (1988) historical account of struggles over the meanings of goods stressed the importance of 'patina', defined as the appearance of use and age, as important indicators of the authenticity of a good, i.e. its relationship to an established aristocratic family rather than an emergent bourgeois one, through the attribution of value. This type of approach to objects implies that qualities within the objects themselves, distinct from their commercially measurable value, inform their use. These qualities are intangible and for McCracken represent the hidden strategies of groups seeking to use consumption as a means of policing barriers around them. Their intangibility also implies that, in the modern sense of ownership, they resist commodification. As Appadurai suggests, "we call those objects valuable

which resist our desire to possess them.” (Appadurai 1986: 67) Whilst the ownership of goods through the act of purchase is the dominant logic of relationships to objects underpinning consumer society, relationships to certain symbolically important objects cannot simply be reduced to questions of ownership.

The self constructed through the acquisition of consumer goods, as has been described in Chapter Two, is perceived by critics of the consumer society as ontologically insecure. One root of this insecurity is the shifting sands that the quick changing world of consumer goods offers for contemporary subjects to build on. The speed at which goods ‘circulate’ is central to this insecurity. As Baudrillard (1998) suggests, human societies have always lived by ‘object time’. The treasured objects of the aristocratic family were used to make links from the past to the present, anchoring individual life experience in a broader historical context and encouraging notions of familial respect. Objects or possessions outlasted individuals and thus had a ‘patina’ of history and permanence. In contemporary consumer society, though, the quick circulation of ever-novel objects means that,

“today it is we who watch them as they are born to maturity and die, whereas in all previous civilisations it was timeless objects, instruments or monuments which outlived the generation of human beings.” (Baudrillard 1998: 25)

This chapter examines the extent to which part of the attraction to books as objects stems from a rejection of the inevitability of this quickened pace of ‘object time’, and by extension a rejection of some of the associated features of consumer society. It also argues that the meanings of books as represented in art and literature suggest they are objects that, in some senses, resist this desire to be ‘owned’. Instead, through connections to notions of permanence and stability, they are used to resist or to slow down the appearance of a quick moving, ever changing, consumer society. In a

similar way, if the rhetoric of consumer society is focussed upon individuality, the consumption of books is more problematically focussed on the formation of group identities.

This approach to books as objects stemmed from responses from bookshop workers about their own relationship to objects. The aim of this discussion is to elaborate upon the possible roots of the particular attitudes to books expressed by respondents. For this it will crucially draw upon representations of books and book production drawn from literature, film and biographies of book trade figures. These sources are not drawn upon to provide an unproblematic eye to the phenomenon of the book, as described by respondents. Rather the use of representations reflects a methodological difficulty in elaborating upon the kinds of intangible characteristics which books seemed to have for the respondents. Whilst a relationship to *reading* can be articulated through a reference to meanings inherent in texts, relationships to objects in themselves are more difficult to pin down. Whilst respondents were, as we shall see, quick to establish books as a *different* and particular type of object with particular types of qualities, the precise nature of this difference proved difficult to examine through the tools of empirical inquiry. 'Because it's books' or 'it's just books' were the typical responses to attempts to get respondents to elaborate upon the nature of these relationships to objects, as if the essence of these relationships were common-sensical or self-evident. Representations, in this case, are being used to articulate this silence and to perhaps examine the historical and theoretical origin of this gap. The following section will examine some representations of books as objects and will pay particular attention to the ideas of books as objects with agency and with aura. The chapter will then focus on some representations of the process of book production and consumption with particular attention to the tensions between the process of creation and the commercial environment drawn from representations of the figure of the writer. It will conclude with a consideration of some

representations of the bookshop itself, using resources suggested by talk with respondents, that were seen to inform their own perceptions of their role and the role of the bookshop, as a distinctive type of space.

Books are alive

“I mean what on earth is there in typography to make everything it deals with sacred?”

Jasper Milvain, *New Grub Street* (Gissing 1891: 13)

The idea that books are objects with a particular kind of agency is a powerful part of the romantic construction of the book. Several respondents noted that a common perception of the pleasures of work in the book industry was, not simply access to the means to develop oneself through the experience of reading, but the *physical* proximity to books that work in a bookshop offered, as if this physical proximity allowed for the expression of a particular kind of relationship to objects. Book lovers, for one respondent, were not simply people who enjoyed reading but were,

“people like me who are quite happy to go and sit in the library and just look at the books. Quite happy to just sit there doing nothing and looking at the books there”¹

These notions of *sitting*, *doing nothing* and *looking* depend upon the construction of the space inhabited by books as a particular kind of space, which one might interpret as peaceful, relaxing and distinct from the realities of the modern world. Another respondent emphasised this notion of being surrounded by books as somehow comforting by evoking the distinction between the public and private spheres

¹ Interview with bookshop worker 11/4/03. This woman was an assistant manager with 4 years' experience in the same branch of a chain bookshop.

“It’s an enormous plus - just being surrounded by books – it’s like being at home because my house is full of books. I think they look nice. Even books that I don’t like look nice.”²

In terms of ‘object time’, this notion of sitting and looking implies a particular communication of meaning between the object and the one who looks at it. A significant proportion of talk with respondents was centred upon relationships they had with books and the extent to which these had informed their ‘choice’ of career and continued to inform their experience of work in the book industry. Whilst enthusiasm for reading was connected with the definition of their role and their status, a particular relationship to books as objects was also evident. This relationship is not simply derived from a process of transfer of the knowledge or information from the book to the reader. Rather, it can be theorised as a quality within the material existence of the books themselves, at least in the terms of the talk of those who work with them, and within the ways in which they have been represented. The definition of oneself as a ‘book person’ or book lover depends, in part, on a recognition of a particular relationship to objects. The book lover does not, for Benjamin, think about books in ways which “emphasise their functional utilitarian value - that is their usefulness - but studies and loves them as the scene and stage of their fate.” (Benjamin 1992: 62) The experience of books is not simply the experience of reading but is a visceral experience involving touch, sight and smell and a physical position within the material world. As such, Benjamin’s notion of aura in connection with symbolically important objects is a concept of particular use in understanding the roots of these feelings.

As Lash and Urry (1994) point out, in the interpretation of the culture industries, the notion of aura is often evoked to point out the extent to which contemporary cultural practices have robbed symbolic objects of some

² Interview with bookshop worker 18/4/03. This woman was Library studies graduate with 5 years experience

essential authenticity in the commercial realm. Chapter Six will elaborate on this. An important element of the experience of books, however, is the extent to which they have maintained an element of aura. For Benjamin, aura was a characteristic inherent within works of art prior to processes of mechanical reproduction that was based upon their uniqueness in time and space. This allowed art objects, such as those involved in religious ritual, to exercise considerable power in pulling agents towards them, through pilgrimage and through defining the spaces in which they existed as sacred. For Benjamin, this process was necessarily exclusionary and implicit in the perpetuation of the power of those priests and kings. The mechanical reproduction of art, for Benjamin, would shatter this power of objects over people and democratise relationships to objects, encouraging a “sense of the universal equality of things.” (Benjamin 1992:217).

Whilst a consideration of books as ‘objects’, rather than texts or literature, complicates Benjamin’s model, the appreciation of the physical proximity of books suggested by respondents is an aesthetic appreciation, akin for our purposes to being in the presence of ‘art’ objects. Featherstone (1991) suggests Benjamin’s model of aura can be translated for contemporary use to the symbolic goods produced by consumer society. Whilst mass produced items may have lost their uniqueness in time and space, they are able to be appreciated in aesthetic rather than simply functional or utilitarian ways, and as such become part of the process of liberating creativity from art, allowing it, “to migrate into a multiplicity of mass-produced everyday items.”

(Featherstone 1991:24) This relates to Lash and Urry’s notion of an aesthetic reflexivity in contemporary selves which allows or encourages relationships to objects which are not simply cognitive or rational. Whilst Lash and Urry (1994) suggest this aesthetic reflexivity is a driving force of contemporary culture industries and by extension an engine of the circulation of aesthetic goods, the experience of aura in the context of books can be seen to re-connect with notions of the utopian or the sacred.

The historical centrality of symbolic objects in the processes of religious ritual inevitably connects our experience and interpretation of these objects with notions of the 'eternal'. This connection stems from a relationship of exchange of meaning between the object and the viewer. In this sense objects which are 'auratic' become objects with agency in which physical proximity suggests the possibility of some kind of 'sacred' experience. Latham (1999) interprets Benjamin's concept of aura as connected to a "phenomenology of perception" (Latham 1999: 452) grounded in the tactile experiences of the body. To invest an object with 'aura' is to invest in it the possibility of action, particularly with regard to recognising and returning the gaze of the observer. This 'humanising' of the object speaks "of the self's shared similarities with the object" (Latham 1999:467) and of the "forgotten human residue in things." (Latham 1999: 467) This implies a relationship to the object which is not based upon commodity status or use value. Whilst auratic objects might be useful, they do not exist to be used. Latham suggests instead they remind the observer of the possibility of separation from the mundanities of the utilitarian and connect with the eternal or the utopian. Thus, "auratic experience is shot through with utopian power. It holds within it a capacity for a kind of looking that is Other to the divided object-subject of capitalist rationality, a way of looking that offers a form of resolution between subject and object." (Latham 1999:467)

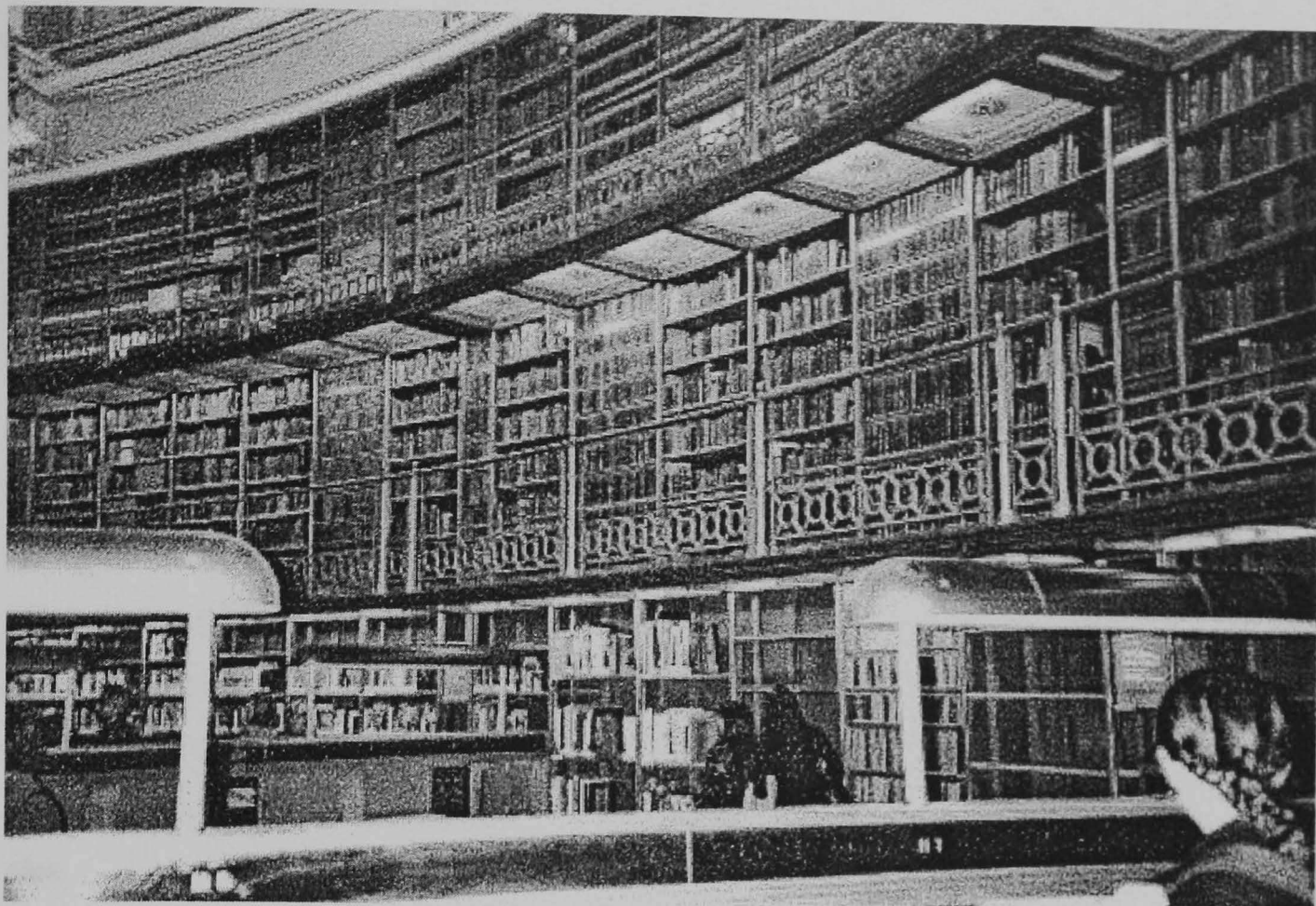


Figure 1 The Reading Room at the British Museum; "the valley of the shadow of books"

The experience of the physical proximity of books, as described by respondents, can be interpreted as auratic. It implies a relationship to objects which does not rest upon the rational criteria of use-value or the commodity status of things. Instead it implies the possibility of a connection with things, a form of mutual recognition, which, in a consumer society that encourages the circulation of commodities, is not measurable in monetary value. This image of the reading room of the British Museum in London can be used to illustrate these points. Here the users of the library are literally dwarfed by the thousands of surrounding volumes. Far from the quick circulation of objects, and the shift in object time implied by Baudrillard, here the sense is that it is the objects which are the permanent feature whilst the readers are ephemeral. Moreover the lighting of this room suggests both the practical and the symbolic. Readers are able to work under the desk lamps but, at the same time, the books are illuminated, not just for the practical necessity of

finding individual titles, but for the spectacular experience of the number of volumes. These objects are not simply stored but displayed. George Gissing's novel *New Grub Street* (1891) describes the reading room, peopled by the scholars of the emergent literary industries of the end of the nineteenth century. These scholars work here to connect themselves with the history of knowledge and learning, through the practical proximity to sources but also through the symbolic proximity to the history of knowledge and ideas, represented through the physical presence of what one character terms "the valley of the shadow of books." (Gissing 1891: 16) For another character, Marian, the presence of this history of ideas inevitably belittles her own mundane attempts to write for a commercial audience. Instead of being inspired by the spectacle of history or auratic experience, work in the library reminds her of the mundanity or profanity of work in this context, such that she,

"kept asking herself the purpose of such a life as she was condemned to lead. When already there was more good literature in the world than any mortal could cope with in his lifetime, here she was exhausting herself in the manufacture of printed stuff. And all these people about her, what aim had they save to make new books out of those already existing, that yet newer books might in turn be made out of theirs?" (Gissing 1891:107)

That commerce might provide the means by which the sacred space is 'profaned' will be explored in the following section about representations of the processes of book production. The symbolic resonance of rows of books, regardless of their content, connect the viewer of these objects with elements of human experience beyond themselves. Whilst this is inevitably compromised by the commercial environment of the bookshop, an element of this particular construction of the book informs and, perhaps ironically, is put to commercial use in the bookshop setting.

One important element of the distinctiveness of the relationship to books as objects is the extent to which the physical presence of books is allowed to symbolise meanings that extend beyond their contents. As we will see in the discussion of the debates around the validity of reading as worthwhile and its connection to a disciplinary construction of the self as a thing to be fulfilled, the consumption of books is allowed to stand in a hierarchy above other types of consumption. Similarly, as we have seen in our discussion of 'aura', books as objects are allowed to be emblematic of a hierarchy of objects. Because of their existence above as well as within conceptions of value based on commodity status, books as objects are allowed to represent values separate from the utilitarian. One respondent described this in relation to her wish for a bookshop filled with unique and auratic objects.

"It would just be the best if we could afford to have the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, if we could afford to have obscure classical texts because they are good things in themselves so it would be great if we could stock them – but you'd have to be like the Tardis and they'd never sell. I don't know there's just something intrinsically good about them."³

It is not the commodity value of the goods that is being celebrated here, the utility of them, or the aesthetic qualities of the texts. The notion of 'intrinsic goodness' ascribes books with a moral status that results from, but is not limited to, their place in the development of modernity and their connections with the spread of the ideas of the Enlightenment. The physical presence of books, rather than the action of reading, becomes emblematic of the manifestation of these ideas. The treatment of these material objects becomes of symbolic importance. Burning books, then, takes on a powerful symbolic resonance with core values of society. Thus symbols of fascists or religious extremists burning books becomes an easy imagery that determines the rejection of extreme political ideologies.

³ Interview with bookshop worker 11/4/01. This worker was an English and Philosophy Graduate with eleven years' experience in the same medium sized chain retailer.

In Ray Bradbury's science fiction novella *Fahrenheit 451* the treatment of books becomes by extension a treatment of these ideas within a dystopian future in which the cognitive, rational and the utilitarian have squeezed out an appreciation of the experience of the aesthetic. In the totalitarian regime as depicted it is not simply books that contain controversial or revolutionary ideas that are suppressed. Instead, all books are forbidden and the agents of the state are dispatched to burn books, as if the destruction of the physical presence of the object would remove the possibility of the ideas, stories or information that they contain.



Figure 2 Firemen at work in *Fahrenheit 451*

This novel, and the subsequent film made by François Truffaut in 1968, depend for their narrative power upon the symbolic status of books within liberal democracies and the coterminous notion that the freedoms of these societies have been won, to some extent, through the spread of the book and that these freedoms are under threat from the forces of totalitarianism and rationalisation. The romantic construction of the book as a means of engaging with the emotions is rejected in this society, (as it was during the historical rise of the reading public discussed in the following chapter) as a possible route to social unrest. This is not justified on the grounds of competing political ideologies, but through an assertion that interaction with phenomena

focussed on the emotions is a likely route to melancholy. In the Truffaut film, all cultural activities are broadcast by the ruling 'family' through a TV wall, including plays that dramatise such mundane activities as buffet menu selection. The existence of the human need for emotional sensation is recognised but controlled through the preponderance of drugs and a ready support structure to cope with inevitable overdoses. The logic of this approach is explained by a leading 'fireman'.

"If you don't want a man unhappy don't give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one. Better yet, give him none... Give the people contests they win by remembering the words to more popular songs or the names of state capitals or how much corn grew in Iowa last year. Cram them so full of non-combustible data, chock them so full of 'facts' they feel stuffed but absolutely brilliant with information. Then they'll feel they're thinking they'll get a sense of motion without moving. And they'll be happy because facts like that don't change. Don't give them any slippery stuff like philosophy or sociology to tie things up with. That way lies melancholy." (Bradbury 1954: 61)

Despite these assertions, dedicated 'readers' resist the totalitarian rationality of the society. In a key scene in the novella and film, the crew of a fire station discovers a hidden library in the attic of an old woman, who chooses to die with her books on a sacrificial funeral pyre. Books, in this instance, become symbolic of a freedom that is worth dying for in the battle with a totalitarian regime. More tellingly perhaps, the attachment to books is used as a means to mark the resistance out as separate from the totalising forces of rationalisation with attachments to things that escape the quantifiable. The resistance movement see their experience as authentic because of their access to the ideas embodied in books, and stand askance from the hyper-rational world of tightly controlled mass culture. Whilst the novel and film aim to satirise totalitarianism, they are also informed by a discourse of resistance to the possibilities of mass culture as homogenising and soul destroying. Books, in this representation, become a means of defining oneself as 'distinct' or resistant to this process – defining oneself as 'singular' in the context of a

‘mass’. This is emphasised by the behaviour of the resistance movement who, as part of their quest for singularity, take it upon themselves to read and learn a book by rote – to literally ‘become’ a book and re-name themselves according to the title. In the hopeful closing scenes of the film this group wander around a pastoral idyll outside of the walls of the city, reciting ‘themselves’ to each other. Thus, books become symbols of a rejection of the excesses of modernity.

Books as objects, then, can be understood as ‘auratic’ in Benjamin’s sense because their physical presence evokes an altered relationship to the social, which can be interpreted as a slowing down of object time and a connection with the world that is not based on commodity value. In a hierarchy of value of objects books are, through their continued ‘aura’, raised above the profane and are even ascribed an ‘intrinsic goodness’. The representation of books in *Fahrenheit 451* builds upon this by implicating books in the construction of core values of freedom of thought in contemporary societies, but also suggests attachment to books can be interpreted as a partial rejection of elements of modern societies such as rationalisation, utilitarianism and the rise of mass culture. This will be built on in the following section, which will examine the representation of the process of book production drawn from some autobiographical sources and from representations of the writer in particular relation to commerce.

Representing the writer

In Bourdieu’s model of the market place for symbolic goods (Bourdieu 1996) and Becker’s construction of the ‘art world’ (Becker 1982), particular emphasis is placed upon the importance of the artist as the individual creative genius behind the process of production, surrounded by like-minded and willing co-workers who bring the products of this genius to the broader

audience, through engagement with the market place. In the process of book production, the author or writer takes on this symbolic role and the image is of the author as a particular type of individual and his/her work as a particular type of non-alienated labour. This section will examine some representations of the author with a particular emphasis on the representation of the commercial logics underlying these productive forces.

The powerful symbol of the writer as original creator represents, for Bourdieu, the attempt to establish the field of literary production as one autonomous from the broader economic field. He draws a parallel between the work of a magician, which requires the collective misrecognition of the audience of 'magic'. In a similar way, the act of the 'creator' would, for Bourdieu,

“be nothing but a crazy gesture without the universe of celebrants and believers who are ready to produce it as endowed with meaning and value by reference to the entire tradition which produced their categories of perception and appreciation.” (Bourdieu 1996: 169)

The reverence with which books are treated, and their symbolic status amongst other commodities, stems in part from this process of recognition of the importance of the role of the writer amongst those engaged in the support work of the literary field, and those consumers who make up its audience.

The figure of the author is an important one, not just for the literary field but for the process of the formation of modernity and, by extension, the understanding of ideas of the contemporary self. Roland Barthes' famous call for 'the death of the author' places the process of intellectual and literary production within broader historical processes that go alongside the emergence of modernity. This has freed the process of literary criticism from a hermeneutic concern with what the author *really meant* to a more critical emphasis on the origin of meaning through language and structure. For the purposes of this project, it is important to stress the centrality of the figure of

the author to the understanding of the emergence of contemporary self. For Barthes, the author is an ideological figure who emerges through the processes of the enlightenment and reformation to stand for a newly recognised 'individual'. Thus, the author is

“a product of our society in so far as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the reformation, it discovered the the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the human person. It is thus logical that in literature it should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author.” (Barthes 2002: 221)

Foucault draws on Barthes in emphasising the emergence of the idea of the author as coterminous with the emergence of the idea of the self. In answering the question what is an author, Foucault asserts,

“the coming into being of the notion of 'author' constitutes the privileged moment of individualisation in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy and the sciences.” (Foucault 2002: 225)

Much as Campbell describes the romantic image of the artist as standing askance from emergent industrial and capitalist relations, we can see that in the figure of the author there retains an element of suspicion, and even resentment, of the economic field that also emerges in the development of modernity. The author may be a modern figure but the image of the author is not necessarily one of celebration of modernity. The world of books as represented in *Fahrenheit 451* also exists as a world of ideas, as a kind of public sphere, which emphasises authentic expression (i.e. *literary* expression) and experience above that produced in relation to commodities. It also represents a space for critique of capitalist relations as much as a space where those relations are acted out, in the exchange of the commodity of the book. Indeed, the rhetorical image of the writer is separate from the

production of commodities. Rather, the act of writing is venerated for creating a space where ideas can be generated and exchanged – as a separate, autonomous but influential field.

This can be explored in relation to the representation of the writer in fiction and in the biographies of book trade figures. Three novels have been chosen that focus on the particular autonomous position of the writer within the economic field and the tensions that emerge in attempting to maintain this position. The presence of a fiction *about* writers is itself an interesting phenomenon and for Bourdieu is evidence of an emergent concern with the ‘interior’ life of the self that he suggests characterises the modern novel (Bourdieu 1996:178). Knut Hamsun’s novel, *Hunger* (1891) most closely resembles this idea of the novel and the act of writing as an account of personal creative struggle. George Gissing’s *New Grub Street* (1891) charts a particular historical moment in the development of the literary field in the U.K. Finally George Orwell’s *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936) portrays another struggling writer and his particular concern with authenticity, defined through a rejection of the commercial. This representation is of particular interest as the central character, Gordon Comstock, is both a published poet and bookshop worker.

A common theme that recurs in these three works is the autonomy of the moment of creation from the economic field and the necessary place of the market in the possibility of the production of the writer. Linked to this is the relationship between personal authenticity and lack of material possession and reward. For the central character in *Hunger*, writing represents a means of maintaining a meagre subsistence existence, and dedication to work depends on material deprivation and repeated trips to the pawnbroker. The figure of the writer, in this book, is a particularly strong representation of the figure of the author as pivotal to the understanding of the experience of the modern self. Detached from any meaningful form of social relationship, he

wanders the city of Kristiania attempting to draw the world's attention to his genius but being constantly rejected or harassed. He represents a kind of flawed flâneur, distant and resentful of urban, modern living. Despite this, Hamsun describes the moment of creation itself as a kind of mystical or spiritual possession in which the writer *loses* his self in the formation of the work.

“Suddenly one or two sentences occurred to me, suitable for a sketch or story, nice linguistic flukes the likes of which I had never experienced before. I lie there repeating these words to myself and find that they are excellent. Presently they are joined by others, I'm at once wide-awake, sit up and grab paper and pencil from the table behind my bed. It was as though a vein had burst inside me – one word follows another, they connect with one another and turn into situations; scenes pile on top of other scenes, actions and dialogue well up in my brain and a wonderful sense of pleasure takes hold of me. I write as if possessed, filling one page after another without a moment's pause. My thoughts strike me so suddenly and continue to pour out so abundantly that I lose a lot of minor details I'm not able to write down fast enough, though I am working at full blast. They continue to crowd on me, I am full of my subject and every word I write is put in my mouth.” (Hamsun 1891:28)

However ecstatic this process of production is for this writer, in and of itself it does not represent success until it has provided some material reward. Ultimately the writer recognises the importance of the economic field in measuring, literally 'weighing' the quality of the product. Thus,

“Elated with a sense of fulfilment and puffed up with joy, I feel on top of the world. I weigh the piece in my hand and appraise it on the spot at five kroner, by a rough estimate. It wouldn't occur to anybody to haggle about five kroner; on the contrary, judging by the quality of the contents one could have to call it a bargain at ten. I had no intention of undertaking such a special piece of work for nothing; as far as I knew you didn't find stories like that by the wayside. I decided in favour of ten kroner.” (Hamsun 1891: 28)

George Gissing's *New Grub Street* explores this process of interaction between the literary and economic fields in more depth. Rather than focus upon the writer as an individual, this work usefully places the process of literary production within the context of a newly emerging profession. Gissing's novel is particularly interesting in that its subject matter is in part a reaction to the passing of the 1870 Education Act that encouraged mass literacy within Great Britain. This was a crucial moment in the development of commercial book publishing and, according to Rose (2001), an important period in the development of 'modernist' literature as an attempt by cultural elites to remove themselves from the mass, through the production and consumption of 'difficult' literature. Crucial to this process was the emerging status of writing as a profession and literature and book production as a trade. This emerging industry needed a willing army of workers for production at a number of levels, i.e. more efficient and organised means of printing and publishing but also more 'raw materials', that is *written* material to be able to buy and sell. This required a specific compromise with the notion of the writer as genius creator and the process of writing as the kind of authentic, pure expression of a particular type of individual.

Gissing's novel charts the careers and emotional lives of a group of writers with varying degrees of commitment to the notion of 'authentically' produced writing and to the attractions of commerce. Three positions can be identified amongst the characters. The first, and most analogous to the romantic figure of the writer, is typified by the character of Biffen who writes for the sake of aesthetic production and eschews commercialism. He lives in a permanent state of 'ascetic' poverty, making a living through personal tuition of the newly literate populace who hope to gain personal advancement through acquiring the trappings of 'culture'. At the same time he dedicates himself to the production of his 'masterpiece', *Mr. Bailey, The Grocer*, an account of the life and struggle of a shop owner of his acquaintance. This work is described as a naturalist account, in the tradition of Zola or Flaubert, that deliberately rejects

any conventional notion of narrative or drama that might detract from the authenticity or truth of the description of the world it contains. It is a self-conscious attempt to be difficult and obscure in the production of a work for its own sake. As Biffen describes it,

“Other men who deal with low class life would perhaps have preferred idealising it – an absurdity. For my own part I am going to reproduce it verbatim. The result will be something unutterably tedious. Precisely. That is the stamp of the ignobly decent life. If it were anything but tedious it would be untrue. I speak of course of its effect on the ordinary reader.” (Gissing 1891:145)

This type of construction of the writer and his product contains two key elements. Firstly it depicts the products of writing as things in themselves, the consumption of which requires the appreciation of the importance of the notion of authenticity. Secondly, in the depiction of ‘low-class’ or ignobly decent it depicts the writer as culturally tied to a higher social class, despite his poverty. That the ‘ordinary reader’ would consider his project tedious emphasises the extent to which the appreciation of this pure or authentic literature requires an orientation to cultural capital, which resists the popular as intrinsically vulgar. It also implies a view of engagement with the literary field as itself something that is out of step with the values of the modern age.

The second representation of the writer is found in the depiction of Reardon, a published novelist struggling with writer’s block and concerned with the reception of his work by the developing number of critical literary journals. Reardon is bound to the notion of using his classical education in the production of literary works but is also required to provide financial support for a wife and son. This requires him to compromise his artistic principles in the production of a popular novel. His commitment to the notion of personal authenticity in the production of literary work makes this impossible and he is forced to leave, both the literary profession and his wife (who is committed to the prestige and cultural capital which being the wife of an author implies), to

take a job as a porter. This representation of the writer begins to question the viability of the commitment to the notion of artistic genius in the production of literary work and, by extension, implies the limited autonomy of the literary field within the broader commercial world.

Finally, Jasper Milvain represents the author explicitly as 'craftsman' with no pretensions to the production of art and no squeamishness about the role of commerce in the world of literature. Milvain sees his role as to use his education in the provision of the kinds of reading material that the mass is perceived to desire and takes entrepreneurial delight in the commercial opportunities that emerge in the development of the production of literature as a trade. This requires a disavowal of the notion of the writer as a creative genius and of the idea of literature as something distinct or sacred. He explicitly states that,

"Literature nowadays is a trade. Putting aside men of genius, who may succeed by mere cosmic force, your successful man of letters is your skilful tradesman. He thinks first and foremost of the markets; when one kind of good begins to go off slackly he is ready with something new and appetising." (Gissing 1891:9)

Whilst 'a cosmic force' might drive men of genius, the far more urgent need in the development of an 'industry' of book production is an appreciation of commercial context, and the technical skills to fulfil the needs of the market.

"People have got that ancient prejudice so rooted in their heads that one mustn't write save at the dictation of the Holy Spirit. I tell you, writing is a business... There's no question of the divine afflatus; that belongs to another sphere of life. I don't advocate the propagation of vicious literature; I only speak of good, coarse, marketable stuff for the world's vulgar." (Gissing 1891:13)

This particular construction of the place of the writer and the place of the world of literature is of particular interest to this project. The notion of democratising the process of literature, so that it reflects the tastes of a popular audience rather than the cultured elite, is a compelling one that informs the contemporary retail trade. However, this process is still, in the values of the trade as a profession, one that involves a particular kind of power relationship between those engaged in the process of production and those who receive the 'good, coarse, marketable stuff'. Moreover these representations of the writer in the context of the modern 'trade' encapsulate Bourdieu's notions of the competing logics of the market place for symbolic goods.

For writers, such as the one described in *Hunger* or represented through the figure of Biffen, commercial reward is not a consideration for engagement in the process of literary production. Rather, there is the internally derived drive for self-expression typical of the myth of the individual creative genius. Indeed Bourdieu argues that for figures such as this, commercial success is precisely evidence that their work is inauthentic and as such is to be avoided. Thus, for Bourdieu, for some workers in the field of literary production, "success is rejected as evidence of mercenary interest in economic and political profits." (Bourdieu 1996: 218) Symbolic profit is accrued through the appreciation of the work amongst a small group of like-minded artists or 'expert' readers. Writers such as Milvain, by contrast, will gain economic success and popular recognition but will never, by virtue of their popular success, acquire the symbolic position of the creative genius.

The necessity of engagement with the economic field is experienced, by writers such as Reardon, as 'selling out', as renouncing the principles of authenticity, derived from romantic notions of the place of the writer as artist, and engaging with the world of commerce. In *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*

Gordon Comstock, another archetypal representation of the struggling artist, sees himself as,

“The poet starving in a garret – but starving somehow, not uncomfortably – that was his vision of himself.” (Orwell 1936: 55)

His personal discovery is the impossibility of this image and its lack of any grounding in the economic field. Setting out on his career as a poet, he has a profound sense of the importance of the sacrifice of material reward in the pursuit of aesthetic excellence. However, his obsession with notions of personal integrity in work produces a kind of creative impotence. Whilst he rejects the pursuit of commercial success and money as being vulgar and worldly, he is forced to take up a series of mundane jobs, including work in a bookshop, in order to meet his immediate material needs. Paradoxically, these leave him physically and emotionally too drained to produce any work with which he is satisfied. For Comstock, money is the source of all his frustrations and the lack of it, does not merely affect his writing, but becomes the defining feature of his exclusion from the modern world, infecting his understanding of his professional and personal life. In particular he describes the lack of autonomy of the literary field.

“Money and culture! In a country like England you can no more be cultured without money than you can join the Cavalry Club....Money writes books, money sells them. Give me not righteousness, O Lord, give me money, only money...Could you write even a penny novelette without the money to put heart in you? Invention, energy, wit, style, charm –they’ve all got to be paid for in hard cash.” (Orwell 1936: 14)

This kind of resentment of the economic sphere is, at the same time, an admission of the inventedness of the notion of the artistic genius and the impossibility of its separation from broader economic relations. In particular, by evoking the concept of ‘culture’, and equating it with the powerful, Orwell explicitly connects cultural and economic capital. The freedom to express

oneself in a literary economy depends, in part, on one's ability to support oneself in a material economy and, as such, this freedom is not spread evenly across a population but produced, to an extent, by established social relationships.

These kind of representations of the process of production are of particular relevance to this study in that they mark out a discursive terrain, which continues to inform how the book trade in general talks about the work that it does and how bookshop workers continue to understand and articulate their role as 'different' from other types of retail. There is a recurrent tension, between the book as a symbolic object and the commercial field, that requires a degree of negotiation and compromise but is based upon a particular romantic construction of the self and a resultant distance from, or rejection or suspicion of, the commercial for many workers. Despite the structural changes within the industry and the narrative of change from 'gentlemanly' to 'corporate' book publishing and selling, these tensions produce powerful narratives within the book trade. Each stage of the production and supply of books can be interpreted using these tensions. If the rhetorical, romantic figure of the writer is compromised by the lack of autonomy of the literary field then other 'producers' within the process of book production are clearly placed under similar pressures. Despite this, there is evidence of a recurring compromise with the economic field in both publishing and bookselling.

The market for symbolic goods is characterised by what Bourdieu terms 'antithetical logics' of economies related to the long-term acquisition of symbolic capital and those related to the short-term satisfaction of the commercial imperative. The entrepreneur, in this economy, is an ambivalent figure who is required to have an interest in disinterestedness or to be, as Bourdieu describes, "a business man and merchant amongst people who owe to themselves the refusal to acknowledge or to be aware of their material interests." (Bourdieu 1996:8) This requires the discursive construction of their

work as not being polluted by crude mercantilism. The production of 'books', then, cannot simply be about the production of commodities and success in publishing cannot simply be reduced to commercial success.

These ambivalent values are reflected in autobiographical representations of the field of book production drawn from across the twentieth century. The changes in this industry can be charted with reference to these sources, but tellingly there are also discursive similarities. In his seminal and influential account, *The Truth About Publishing*, Stanley Unwin neatly evokes the inverted economic logic of the symbolic market-place when he suggests that,

“Publishing has rewards to offer far greater than money. A decent enough living can be made at it, if you have really mastered the technique or have the necessary aptitude; but your days’ work will never be done and it is possible that the better work you do, the less monetary reward you will receive.”
(Unwin 1926: 332)

The idea that commercial logic itself does not apply to the publishing of books is echoed in the comments of Frederic Warburg, founder of Secker and Warburg. Referring to his brother-in-law, a fellow member of the trade he suggests an inherent rejection of money for its own sake informs work in this industry but also that this rejection is somehow emblematic of the fact that workers in this trade are out of step with the broader world. Thus,

“He knew unerringly that no-one but a fool went into publishing to make real money. In his view there could only be two reasons for becoming or remaining a publisher, that you were dotty about books or that you couldn’t find a job elsewhere.” (Warburg 1959: 80)

Latterly, Jason Epstein, co-founder of the *New York Review of Books* and creator of Anchor books, suggests that the adoption of the tactics and values of commercial world is to be avoided even within the corporate setting of the publishing industry at the dawn of the twentieth century. The *essence* of the

industry he evokes is analogous to the autonomy implied by Bourdieu, under threat from the dominant commercial field. Book publishing, as a business is intrinsically different, such that,

“Book publishing deviates from its true nature by assuming under duress from unfavourable market conditions and the misconceptions of remote managers the posture of a conventional business...It more clearly resembles an amateur sport in which the primary goal is the activity itself rather than its financial outcome.” (Epstein 2001: 4)

A failure to recognise this difference is indicative of a failure to recognise the value of books as products that are not defined by their commodity status. André Schiffrin, former head of the independent publisher Pantheon, describes his struggle with the executive of the larger conglomerate, Random House, following the merger of the two companies. The very presence of a corporate executive in the process of production of books is considered distasteful or inauthentic, culminating in the assertion that the businessman cannot understand the subtle, mysterious values of the publishing trade. Describing his colleague Schiffrin notes,

“In a sky-scraper where nearly every office was filled with books, Vitale’s offered a stark contrast. Not a book could be found on his shelf; the photographs on display were not of authors but of his yacht.” (Schiffrin 2000:89)

The evident distaste for materialism here is interesting. ‘The yacht’ is interpreted as a symbol of excess, whilst an office lined with books and decorated with images of authors is a more authentic orientation to books. Without this, the subtleties of the inverted economic logic of the market for symbolic goods escape the executive. Whilst the acquisition of symbolic profits requires the production of work that is definitively anti-commercial,

“For him it was if we were a shoe manufacturer making sizes too small to fit most customers.” (Schiffrin 2001: 91)

The appreciation of books as more than just commodities is, in a sense, a hidden strategy that excludes those workers in the contemporary industry driven by commercial imperatives alone from the symbolic profits available through, as Unwin describes it,

“the feeling that one may be building with permanent materials, the knowledge that one’s name is associated with books that enshrine profound thought and the triumphs of the creative imagination.” (Unwin 1926:341)

The treatment of publishing as just another trade, or of books as just another commodity, by contrast, robs books of their ‘agency’ and as such robs them of their essence. This is based upon an assumption of an impossible relationship between the products of commerce and authentic cultural production. Though this is also tied up with notions of the possibilities of ‘mass culture’ being anything other than diminished or mindless. The commercialisation of literature, for Unwin, is

“based on the assumption that manuscripts and books are mere commodities; dead not living things.” (Unwin 1926: 9)

Alongside the notion of ‘aura’ connecting books as objects with the ‘sacred’ or the ‘eternal’, representations of the process of book production from the perspective of writers and publishers indicate more important elements of the ‘difference’ of books as objects. The rhetorical figure of the writer is an important source of meanings of the contemporary self. Paradoxically, the power of this figure depends upon a perpetuation of ideas of the creative genius as someone who stands askance from the material conditions of the world and creates ‘authentic’ work. At the same time though, the success of this figure requires engagement with the commercial field and a willing support industry, prepared to forego material success, for the symbolic profits

available through the association with symbolically important things. The final element of this difference will be examined in the following section, which considers the representations of the bookshop as a particular type of retail space.

Perceptions and representations of the bookshop

“So easily pictured, if you don’t work in one, as a kind of paradise where charming old gentlemen browse eternally among calf-bound folios....” George Orwell, *Bookshop Memories* (Orwell 1968:242)

This section aims to examine the extent to which the meanings surrounding the ‘difference’ of books as symbolic objects, produced in particular ways by particular types of people, feeds into the understanding of the bookshop itself, as a particular kind of space, peopled by a particular type of person and fulfilling a broader function than simply the exchange of commodities. The contemporary retail industry is itself characterised by concerns that extend beyond the simple fulfilling of consumer ‘needs’ or even ‘wants’. Given the apparent centrality afforded consumption and consumerism to the understanding of the contemporary experience of the self, as outlined in chapter two, retail environments take on a particular significance, as the spaces in which the symbolic goods that are assumed to provide the resources for contemporary identity work are stored. As du Gay (1996) suggests, contemporary retail is as much about the exchange of meanings as it is about the exchange of things, and the act of shopping becomes itself a means of self-expression through choice and acquisition. If, in conditions of late modernity, there exists a consumer society, then shopping represents a way, arguably the only way, in which this society performs its sociality. The image of ‘shopping’ as a leisure pursuit in itself reinforces the notion of the self-actualising consumer as the defining agent of the contemporary age. Shopping appears,

“as sheer haven or, more prosaically as the symbol of modern mobility; People are no longer restricted to their traditional horizons, whether geographical, social or psychological; consumer choice epitomises their liberty to move away from old restrictions, to indulge the freedom of new desires and demands and to take on different identities as they wish. This is also the dream world of shopping’s own self-images, its beautiful stores and its glossy advertisements where people’s desires are treated as forever open to change and fulfilment.” (Bowlby 2000: 4)

Alongside this valorisation of shopping is a darker tale of manipulation of people through advertising and of a more subtle but powerful narrative in which, if shopping is the route to the satisfied (if not quite complete) self, contemporary subjects are not free, but compelled to engage in this activity. Shopping is also the moment in which the dream like experiences of consumer culture are grounded in reality as shoppers are reminded, quite literally, that the freedoms they seek are not theirs by right but come at a price. The high street may contain a myriad of possible identities but all these are required to go through a till. The rise of the celebration of shopping as freedom has been accompanied by broader social and economic processes that have produced homogenised, globalised shopping centres and an accompanying resistance to these processes. Small independent businesses and ethically minded consumers represent dissident voices in the processes informing the social organisation of shopping. Alongside the growth of a consumer identity is a significant tendency of anti-consumerism, or a reluctance to define oneself as a ‘consumer’. These tendencies, like the romantic tendencies of anti-industrialism, are not simply informed by political conviction but by a reluctant stance towards the modern world, together with a concern for personal and political authenticity. As with Campbell’s romantic self and with Lash and Urry’s aesthetic reflexivity, the critique of consumerism is paradoxically implicit in its development, as these concerns with the personal and non-commercial are re-packaged within the symbolic products of consumer society.

The shop itself is a product of historical processes, which have both informed and been informed by the rise of the figure of the consumer. Broader social and economic forces of rationalisation and technological advance have influenced the design and organisation of the retail space, the processes of management and organisation of stock control and staff training. According to Bowlby (2000), the bookshop has been important in these developments, particularly with regard to pioneering the rise of the 'self-service' type shop that is the most typical in the contemporary high street or mall. The idea that the consumer his/herself can wander through a particular shop, pick up and replace the items on display without the assistance of a shopkeeper is a compelling image that feeds into and builds upon the idea of the consumer as sovereign in the shopping setting. The idea that we, as shoppers, can help ourselves neatly ties this historical development with broader social narratives of individualisation and consumer freedom. Self-service is also implicitly linked to the technical skill of literacy, as shoppers in a self-service setting are required to read and understand labels and recognise brands.

The bookshop, for Bowlby (Bowlby 2000: 193), was the first to adopt this approach, making use of shelving that was not confined behind a counter and that was designed for display and for browsing. As such, she argues, bookshops were the pre-cursor to the supermarket and amongst the first shops which assumed a knowledgeable and capable consumer. This is particularly interesting given the subsequent use of the image of the bookshop as both a criticism of the ways in which the book trade has been organised and the subsequent development of the image of the bookshop as a space that is different from other types of shops. Retail bookselling is caught in a permanent state of contradiction, played out in the discursive battles between entrepreneurs who seek to emphasise its profitability and decry its inefficient or old-fashioned methods, and those who seek to

preserve its traditions and hold it up as a bulwark against excessive materialism.

The notions of 'aura' and the ambivalence of the commodity status of books outlined in the preceding discussion inform the 'difference' of bookshops. The bookshop is afforded a particular type of reverence compared to other shops, some of which are simply functional or mundane, or some of which are tellingly symbolic of the excesses of materialism. Just as books were described above as auratic objects, with a kind of moral agency that defied their status as commodities, so bookshops are spaces where these meanings are stored. The publisher Jason Epstein thus describes how,

"A civilisation without retail booksellers is unimaginable. Like shrines and other sacred meeting places, bookstores are essential artefacts of human nature. The feel of a book taken from the shelf and held in the hand is a magical experience linking writer to reader." (Epstein 2001:38)

What is interestingly lacking in this description of the value of bookshops is any concern with the less 'magical' and more mundane process of monetary exchange. In terms of the autonomy of the field of literary production and consumption this is the *real* link between writer and reader but it is not one that is allowed to pollute the romantic construction of the book or bookshop. The process of selling books as objects is thus constructed as distinct from the process of selling other objects. The practices of selling other types of objects are often invoked in book trade discourse as a means of defining what bookshops are not. In his textbook on how to be a bookseller, *The Bookselling Business*, former head of Hatchard's bookshop in Piccadilly Thomas Joy explains how,

"The use of such methods as those of, say, a hairdresser forcing hair creams or shaving foam upon an unwitting customer drives customers away." (Joy 1974: 62)

The implication here is that other types of selling are somehow vulgar, or involve a process of manipulation or tricking of customers. Selling books is a more subtle process which, rhetorically at least, is informed by more noble ideals. As we shall see in our discussion of the practices of price maintenance within the book trade, books are objects that have historically been legally protected from the market place as a means of preserving their non-commodity status. This kind of difference feeds into the perceptions of bookshops, from both workers and customers, and informs the representation of the bookshop.

As part of the interviews respondents were asked to reflect upon the image of the bookshop as a shop and whether or not these perceptions were based upon reality. One common theme was the perception of customers that the bookshop must be a pleasant environment to work in, informed in part by the auratic experience of the physical proximity of books and the romantic construction of books as inherently good objects. One manager described

“Customers quite often say they would love to work in a bookshop because they can spend all day reading books and they want to be surrounded by books. That’s not true but it’s a nice idea.”⁴

This kind of description was often described as ‘naïve’ and old fashioned and with reference to popular narratives and stereotypes of the bookseller as someone out of step with ‘the modern world. These perceptions were also interpreted as in some senses out of step with the contemporary reality and experience of bookshop work. Thus,

“I think it’s an old fashioned view that we need to come away from. There’s still this perception out there – take *Notting Hill* –

⁴ Interview with bookshop manager 12/4/01. This man had twenty years’ experience working and managing in a number of shops for a number of firms. He was currently manager of a large city centre branch of a chain retailer.

bookshops are typically where people feel the need to whisper and wear cardigans.”⁵

Popular narratives also failed to recognise the mundane reality of the experience of the work and in a similar way to Epstein’s construction of the sacred space of the bookshop were seen to valorise the possibilities of the retail space,

“People think of *84 Charing Cross Road*, don’t they and that you are going to have books on the most amazing wide range of subjects. You don’t realise things like unpacking or checking stock and you don’t realise the business side of it, you don’t realise one book is on the shelf and its there because it sells more than another book that might have been on the shelf.”⁶

Narratives such as *Notting Hill* or *84 Charing Cross Road* are used by workers to reflect upon the disjunction between the perception of the bookshop and its reality. Representations of the bookshop are also useful in dramatising some themes about the place of the bookshop and the bookshop worker within retail and within contemporary society.

The central narrative of *Notting Hill*, for example, is of an unlikely romance between the owner of a small travel bookshop, William, and an American movie star. The film sets up an opposition between the two as representatives of distinct and competing values. The actress represents the shallowness of celebrity and the assumed vacuousness of mass culture. The bookseller, by contrast, represents authenticity and separation from the ‘rat-race’ of modern life. The area of London is described as a village within the metropolitan area of London, rather than a stifling, faceless, urban setting. The shop itself is making a loss, though in the context of the film this fact is not seen to drive the owner or his worker into action, rather it is used as a symbol of the

⁵ Interview with Academic bookshop manager 12/12/01. This respondent was a Psychology graduate with 13 years experience in the trade and 4 years’ experience as a manager.

⁶ Interview with bookshop worker 11/4/01. This respondent was an English and Philosophy graduate with eleven years’ experience working for the same chain retailer.

separation of the shop from the real world. Relationships with customers are also 'authentic', with no attempt to *sell* goods. Rather William is shown being sarcastic to a customer who wants to buy a popular novel and discouraging to another who picks up a title to browse. "Should browsing turn to buying", he suggests, "you should know that that book is rubbish and you'd be wasting your money."



Figure 3 Notting Hill. The bookseller as reluctant merchant.

In this the bookshop and the bookseller are authoritative figures, defenders of a rarefied notion of culture but also seen as acting in the best interests of the customer with no regard for commercial concerns.

In the real world of the bookshop –and the chain bookshop in particular – such approaches to notions of profit and attitudes towards customers would be disastrous, but bookshops retain an air of 'gentle' capitalism in which commercial concerns are not paramount which, paradoxically makes them attractive places for their customers. Shopping for identity for the late-modern subject may be a risky venture due to the bewildering range of goods on offer in the ever-changing market place. The bookshop can be seen to represent a symbol of relative calm within this world. As one manager explained,

“We would not ask customers to go if they were just browsing. I’d rather have a shop full of people looking at the books than an empty shop”⁷

In the contemporary high street or shopping centre in which the spaces of city centres have become privatised and dedicated to commercial operations, the bookshop can be recognised as one of the few places in which one can *be* without necessarily spending money or engaging in anything other than browsing. In the context of the history of shopping, this kind of perception of the bookshop is informed by a kind of nostalgia. However much the rise of the self-service shop has empowered consumers, it has also removed elements of social interaction from the experience of shopping, an image exemplified by the impersonal supermarket. As well as being empowering, the experience of shopping is also potentially alienating, as consumers are required to gain the knowledge to allow them to function as competent shopping agents. The bookshop offers the possibility of other, less instrumental, ways of being and also a refuge to those shoppers for whom such approaches are reductive – consumers who resist their definition as consumers. Orwell describes a fictional customer in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* thus,

“He was a habitué of bookshops, yet never stayed longer than ten minutes in one shop. A passionate hunger for books, and the fear of being a nuisance were constantly at war in him. After ten minutes in any shop he would grow uneasy, feel himself de trop, and take to flight having bought something out of sheer nervousness.” (Orwell 1936: 25)

This characterisation of the bookshop customer as, somehow out of step with and uncomfortable with the world is echoed in a comment from a respondent who suggests that,

“I think people who read books a lot are a bit odd aren’t they? I mean, we’re not. I was going to say people are introverted, it’s

⁷ Interview with bookshop manager 12/4/01. This respondent was manager of a city centre retailer with twenty years’ experience within the trade.

not true and it's not people who don't live in the real world either, they are quite competent, capable people, it's people who are slightly apart from the mainstream in general really, for whatever reasons they are not into making loads and loads of money and having a big house in Surrey – they are more thoughtful people, maybe is a way of putting it, less materialistic.”

Describing his own relationship to shopping this respondent tellingly adds,

“I don't like going in clothes shops because I never feel cool enough if you know what I mean”⁸

The evocation of notions of ‘cool’ and its association specifically with fashion strongly evokes a particular attitude to consumer society as something that is going on elsewhere to the experience of this respondent. Fashion and cool become emblematic of an attachment to material things in and of themselves. The bookshop, its customers and, in this example, its workers are allowed to stand for a rejection of these approaches.

In response to this, Bowlby suggests, is a narrative which evokes a romantic past of ‘personal’ relationships established through shopping in which the consumer wasn't required to be all knowing as no-one was out to trick them. In this narrative, “once there was a friendly relationship between salesman (sic) and buyer, clerk and customer, effortlessly blending business with human warmth.” (Bowlby 2000:40) This kind of image of a gentle capitalism, is found readily in the representation of the bookshop. One respondent evokes this nostalgia, describing bookshops in these terms,

“They are like the meeting place, like the corner shop we used to have where people would come in and meet up.”⁹

⁸ Interview with bookshop manager. This was a large bookshop situated within a shopping centre. The respondent was an English graduate with twenty years' experience of work in a number of chain bookselling firms.

⁹ Interview 20/01/02. This respondent had over thirty years' experience in the trade and had completed an apprenticeship in bookselling on continental Europe.

Miller (1999) connects these feelings of 'difference' around bookshops as retail spaces as being explicitly connected in the American context to notions of community relationships between people, which are not reducible to their position as 'buyer' and 'seller'. Miller suggests the image of the 'independent' bookseller is particularly important to this and that the rise of the chain bookseller has been equated with a loss of the possibility of authentic relationships between bookshop customers and bookselling firms. The independent bookseller in these debates is seen to represent a purer form of commerce, which does not have profit as its motive. Struggles between corporate and independent booksellers are not simply commercial struggles for market share but, for Miller, they represent 'moral' debates. For our purposes this can be broadened out to represent a conflict between a cognitive rationality, easily mapped onto commercial and economic imperatives which focus on giving the customer what he or she wants (and work on the assumption that what this rational agent wants is cheaper products), and an aesthetic reflexivity, which can be related to an orientation to cultural capital which privileges other ways of relating to objects and other ways of being. It also demonstrates the discursive connection between books and bookshops as indicative of broader ambivalence to late modernity. This can be demonstrated through reference to trade press and media debates and a particular narrative representation that dramatises this tension.

The independent bookshop, as Miller argues, is allowed to stand for the communal and the authentic. The corporate bookshop, by contrast, embodies the impersonal and the commercial. These meanings inform the narrative of the 1999 film *You've Got Mail*, which concerns a romance between the owner of a small independent bookshop and an executive of the firm of chain booksellers whose new branch threatens to put, and ultimately succeeds in putting, the independent shop out of business. The film charts a similar tension as identified in *New Grub Street* about the production of literature and its relationship with commerce. In the context of the bookshop, though, this

tension is complicated. The film, in both its narrative and its inter-textual context, evokes a kind of Capraesque gentle, personable capitalism (it is a remake of the 1940 film *The Shop Around the Corner* which starred the epitome of small town values, James Stewart) in the unfolding of the drama, caricaturing both the moral superiority of the independent and the rampant commerciality and associated moral bankruptcy of the corporate seller. The independent store (itself called *The Shop Around the Corner* to emphasise its implicit concrete embodiment within the community) evokes tradition and permanence and particular types of relationships with customers. Customers and staff address each other by their first names and readings are held to introduce the children of the neighbourhood to the 'magic' of reading. In describing the mother from whom she inherited the shop, Katherine, the shop owner claims her action as not motivated by the petty concerns of the small business owner. Rather, "It wasn't that she was just selling books – she was helping people be who they wanted to be." This nobility of intention explicitly connects books with the formation of the romantic self. Moreover, it removes bookselling from being involved in a process of commodity exchange at all. This is emphasised by a description of the shop from Katherine's partner, a columnist on a broad-sheet newspaper, as "A lone reed, standing tall, waving proudly in the corrupt sands of commerce."

Such constructions stand in stark contrast to the large chain bookshop, which Katherine describes as "big, impersonal, over-stocked and full of ignorant sales-people." Whilst debating the advantages of advertising their forthcoming opening, the managers of the chain store specifically draw upon the construction of the experience of chain selling as somehow recognised as inauthentic. If the independent represents tradition and community, the chain superstore is emblematic of morally dubious and voracious capitalism. Thus, the manager suggests, "we might as well tell them we're opening a crack-house. Soon as they hear they're going to be out to picket the big bad chain store that's going to destroy everything they hold dear." Defending the chain,

though, the executive argues that, ultimately, 'what people want' is quantifiable, calculable and embodied in price and volume. He argues, "we are going to seduce them with our square footage and our discounts and our cappuccinos...They are going to hate us in the beginning but they'll love us in the end."



Figure 4 Picketing the big bad chain. The independent bookshop as symbol of community in *You've Got Mail*.

Similar tensions are identifiable in the contemporary retail trade. The closure of 10% of small or independent bookshops in the U.K since 1995 (Guardian 5th March 2001) and the rise of the book superstore within the U.K are accompanied by "appropriate woe-is-us quotes" (Engel 2001), that discursively link the decline of the independent with a loss of authenticity in book retail. This is supported by the accompanying representation of the rise of the superstore as somehow 'faceless' and lacking in 'charm'. One independent bookshop manager describes a newly opened 'super-store' in these terms,

"Inside the store is fairly typical, if somewhat more spacious, branch with an impressive stock of books and CDs, a stationery concession, café and grand piano. Outside the store has all the

charm of a DIY shed – hardly surprising because that is what it is.” (Barker 2003)

The failure of this shop is not that it does function as a bookshop or indeed as a profitable endeavour. Instead, it removes the connection between bookselling and the gentle capitalism, which has informed much of its recent history. Tellingly, it also represents the faceless and the disconnected, in contrast with the symbolic ‘shop around the corner’. The manager describes the perilous journey to the out of town site,

“As you approach the roar of the motorways is constant and the entangled strands of tarmac that pass for the ring-road interchange offer a hazardous approach for even the most determined book buyer (Do a U-turn at the lights where the road widens to six lanes, hang tight to the near side lane, indicate left after the drive-thru Burger King).” (Barker 2003)

There is a suspicion and resentment of this type of ‘mall’ shopping experience and its associations with fast food as an embodiment of cultural decline. These types of chain store developments threaten the status of bookshops as oases in this consumerist or materialist desert. Paradoxically, the large superstore bookshop has reacted to this through the inclusion within its design of coffee shop, bars and restaurants to encourage shoppers to think of it as a place in which to *be*, rather than simply a place in which to shop. However, there remains an element of suspicion of the validity of mixing commerce with ‘culture’ that characterises the market for symbolic goods. This has found recent expression in the experience of the U.K retailer Waterstone’s and its attempts to centralise and rationalise its stock ordering procedures and to standardise its relationships with publishers in terms of ‘margin’. Both these innovations have not simply been interpreted as the action of a corporate power flexing its financial muscle in the commercial market place. Rather they have been interpreted as an attack on the soul of the trade. Even the subsequent reduction in price of books in Waterstone’s shops was not universally welcomed, as focus on price competitiveness and

sales compromised the image of the shop as a particular kind of retail environment and the possibility of books as objects that can be measured through alternative sources of value. For publishers with competing views of their role in the literary and economic fields such shifts are problematic. Ricketts quotes one as positively declaring,

“No longer do we have to deal with snotty arts-graduates to get books by big-name authors into branches.” (quoted in Ricketts 2001)

Another publisher suggests that processes of rationalisation inevitably dilute some inherent essence to the process of bookselling which is not ‘merely’ committed to goals of commercial reward but oriented to books as particular types of cultural resource. He argues that,

“It is the breadth and range of titles that made everyone want to go and visit Waterstone’s. Its whole support of the diversity of writing has been shrinking. It has lost so much of what it stood for.” (quoted in Ricketts 2001)

The removal of local autonomy from bookshop workers and managers has been interpreted as removing the possibility of any sort of ‘community’ relationship with customers. This particular debate is crystallised around the sacking of the manager of the successful Waterstone’s branch in Manchester over disagreements about buying policies. What the shops were allowed to stock by head office was seen in this narrative to conflict with perceptions of what a good bookshop ought to stock. Such an action by a chain bookseller neatly represents two key tensions in the market place for symbolic goods. Firstly, between the book as a commodity and the book as an ‘auratic’ or inherently good object with more ephemeral sources of value. Secondly, between the type of gentle capitalism associated with bookshops - their existence outside of the materialistic world of consumer culture - and with the rise of the impersonal centralised buying and selling experience, which

typifies contemporary shopping experiences. In a trade press debate about the rationalisation of Waterstone's both tensions were represented (*The Bookseller* 16/11/2000). One contributor explained,

"While I can understand the sentimental whining of those who feel that Waterstone's has lost its traditional edge as a range bookseller, a lot of them need to wake up and smell the commercially viable coffee."

There is a recognition here, as with Jasper Milvain in *New Grub Street*, of the existence of an orientation within the book industry which casts it as separate from the mundane world of commerce. This is seen as both nostalgic and, crucially, unrealistic. Such discursive privileging of the economic field is contrasted with a contribution from a customer who neatly summarises an anti-corporate sentiment

"I cannot believe that a lot of egotistical, know nothing, money grubbing "suits" will do anything more interesting than stock the shop with anything other than an endless flood of vacuous glossy media tie-ins."



Figure 5 Protesting against rationality. Robert Topping demonstrates outside Waterstone's in Manchester. 'The Mekon' is chief executive David Kneale.

The removal of the autonomy of is interpreted as an attack on the authenticity of the process of buying and selling books. This is replaced by rationalisation of mass marketing of cheap titles, made possible through economies of scale,

particularly in dealings with large publishers, that results in a 'vulgarisation' of the bookshop. The historian Frederic Raphael describes his own experience of Waterstone's in these terms.

"Years ago there was no shortage of bookshops. W.H. Smith put them all out of business and substituted mags for books. But then Waterstone's came along and we could all cheer again. It was a chain but individual managers had discretion. Bookish assistants were in charge of departments they knew and cared about. I bought a lot of stuff there. I went back yesterday and found the whole ground floor stacked with special offer paperbacks. The shop, I discovered now has to take what it gets sent from head office. A bookshop, which was founded to scupper the vulgarians, is now king amongst them. I left without buying anything and hurried to John Sandoe in Blackland's terrace where – in three cottagy rooms- there are more desirable titles than in the whole of Waterstone's pulp-ridden warehouse." (Raphael 2002)

This narrative encapsulates nostalgia for a golden age of bookshops and holds out the possibility of a knowing chain retailer, staffed by bookish assistants, serving the consumer, who resents the vulgar trappings of contemporary commerce. Ultimately (and apparently inevitably in this world weary narrative) the commercial pollutes the spirit of the bookshop and the real book lover is banished to the 'three cottagy rooms' of the authentic independent. This account also implicates the feeling of loss associated with the pollution of the sacred space of the bookshop with a loss of cultural authority threatened by the 'massification' of the bookshop.

This chapter has outlined some of the meanings that underline the discursive construction of books as 'different' kinds of objects and bookshops as different kinds of retail spaces. It has identified three main elements to this difference. Firstly, the notion of aura drawn from Benjamin implies an agency in books as objects and connects them with notions of the utopian, the sacred and the eternal. This in contrast to the quickened object time of consumer society, which stresses the ephemeral and the shallow. Linked to this is the

association of the processes of the production of books, or more specifically the act of writing, with the creative artist and the separation of this field of production from the broader economic field. As a result books are not simply valued as commodities but can, in some sense, stand aside from the consumer market place, in the same way as the products of the romantic artist were theorised by Campbell as standing above the vulgar and utilitarian products of the developing industrial order. In this sense, books reflect an aesthetic reflexivity and the experience of books allows for the possibility of ways of being which are not easily calculable and quantifiable. Finally, the bookshop was examined as a source of nostalgic meaning about the value of commercial products, the relationship between buyers and sellers and as a refuge from the excesses of consumer society and corporate capitalism in particular. Bookshops were seen to evoke contested notions of authenticity in their practices, which were represented as distinct from other types of commercial exchange. The idea of community was used as a means of marking the bookshop out a particular type of retail space in which the pressures of commercial capitalism were absent or at least managed. The notion of community is a powerful narrative tool in understanding the experience of contemporary society. The success of social scientific narratives such as Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2001) suggests a central place for notions of community for re-integrating the fractured selves of the late-modern age. However, in the context of the bookshop as a particular retail space, it is worth bearing in mind the ambiguity of this concept. Community also involves a process of selection and exclusion of social groups. Its romantic construction can be problematised in relation to broader debates about the emergence of the reflexive, late-modern self, freed from the constraints of 'community'. What is also at stake in these debates in the context of the book industry is the cultural authority of a particular social group, the validity of a particular approach to cultural capital and the possibility of this approach in contributing to the maintenance of group, rather than merely individual identities. These debates explicitly connect the

production and consumption of books with broader sociological narratives about the possibility and status of the self in the late modern age. Concepts such as aura, a problematised commodity status and anti-corporate sentiment informed by notions of community represent three 'dreams' which inform the experience of bookshop work. These dreams are put to work in the definition of the role of the bookshop worker and compromised through the reality of the experience of shop work. These tensions will be explored in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 5 'Live life - buy the book'¹

The aim of this chapter is to apply some of the themes that emerged from the discussion of consumption in Chapter Two and apply them to the complex history of book consumption. A central argument of this thesis is that the things that people sell in service and retail environments are of particular importance in understanding their experience of their work. This argument is used as one means of problematising the broad theoretical narrative of work and consumption as distinct and competing resources for the construction of the contemporary self. This chapter will develop these ideas by focussing upon the different historical meanings associated with the consumption of books and by exploring the different contemporary meanings associated with book consumption. As discussed in Chapter Two, writers such as Bourdieu (1984) and McCracken (1988) have strongly asserted the place of certain types of cultural consumption in the formation and policing of divisions of social class. Bryan Turner (1992) drew on Foucault (1986, 1988) by suggesting that, in the contemporary context, consumption was a central means of disciplining and controlling the self. Further, the work of Colin Campbell (1983, 1987) was used to illustrate that a central strand of the development of consumption as the historical ally of production was the emergence of a romantic self, realised through experience, which looked askance at the utilitarian market place. These three strands of sociological understanding of consumption can all be brought to bear in the study of the consumption of books, the study of the book trade more generally and the study of the experience of bookshop work in particular. If the things that people sell have meaning to them, then this meaning must have a history and may have theoretical explanations. This chapter will begin to elaborate on both.

¹ Slogan printed on the carrier bag of a chain bookseller, September 2002

There are two distinct problems with this approach, which need to be addressed. For the sake of ontological clarity there is a need to define the two key terms of this inquiry, both of which have a particular patina of coherence. Firstly, what are we talking about when we talk about *books*? Secondly, how are these objects consumed? Robert Escarpit (1971) helpfully outlines this difficulty in his discussion of an attempt to legally define 'books' by UNESCO, which suggested a book was "a non-periodical publication containing over forty-nine pages". "But Lebanon and South Africa demand fifty, Denmark sixty, Hungary sixty-four, Ireland, Italy and Monaco require one hundred!" (Escarpit 1971:11) Such a definition, of course, focuses on the materiality of the book. In establishing social meanings around book consumption, the number of readers is as, arguably more, relevant to the definition of books as the number of pages and more relevant still is some qualitative account of who these readers are and how and why they read.

Reading itself is a particular kind of consumption. The book industry operates within two different but overlapping economies that map onto Bourdieu's (1996) concept of the market for symbolic goods. Symbolic goods, he argues, operate both within a symbolic economy, with its own logic, and within the broader economic economy, to which the symbolic economy is ultimately beholden. The particular tensions between these competing economies will be explored more fully in the discussion of the book trade as a productive sphere in the following chapter. For our purposes here, however, it is worth re-iterating the complex sociological meanings around consumption in general, which make a definition that depends on privileging the moment of economic exchange problematic. The following chapter will illustrate the extent to which, within the book industry, the selling of the product is constructed as a different kind of selling. The purpose of this chapter's discussion is to elaborate upon the ways in which the buying of books is a different type of buying and this difference is informed by long historical constructions of books as a particular type of commodity – one that can be

thought of, like other products of the culture industries, as not a commodity at all. These meanings inform the experience of work in the book industry and in bookshop work in particular. This will be explored through a discussion of contemporary and historical meanings attached to book consumption and through evidence of how the book trade has historically talked about its products and particularly its consumers.

Reading as Consumption

As Chapter Two illustrated, sociological accounts have explored the ways in which consumption needs to be understood as a far more complex process than simplistic monetary or commodity exchange. The exchange and use of goods has been understood as central to the formation of individual and group identities, both historically in the West, and in other countries and cultures. The contemporary context, within what has become known as a consumer culture, the act of consumption has emerged as of particular importance to the extent that it can be thought of as having replaced production as the central organising institution of modern Western societies. Alongside the celebration of the apparent freedoms that this offers, Chapter Two also identified a parallel strand of resentment of consumerism as materialistic and vulgar. This was identified as having strong historical roots in the Romantic Movement and was typified by Marx's assertion that 'ownership' was the opposite of 'being' – the more you 'have', he suggested, the less you 'are' (Marx 1963:172). This position feeds into contemporary accounts of the rise of consumer society as evidence of workers being exploited and alienated both in their work and leisure time, tricked into passively consuming the baubles of capitalism which obscure their alienation from their 'true' or 'authentic' selves.

The place of books in this process is intriguingly ambivalent. Marx precedes his comments on ownership with a list of things that constitute 'being'.

“The less you eat, drink, buy books, go to the theatre or to balls or to the public house and the less you think, love, theorise, paint, fence etc. the more you will be able to save and the greater will become your treasure which neither moth nor dust will corrupt – your capital. The less you are the more you have – it is accumulation that robs you of being.” (Marx 1963:171)

Intriguingly for this project, the ‘buying of books’ is clearly located here as separate from accumulation and part of the idealisation the hedonistic, all-painting, all-theorising consumer. The buying of books is not constructed as a commodity exchange but as a means of realising or re-integrating an alienated self. As such it is a particular type of consumption, of a different order to the materialistic capitalist market place. This resonates strongly with Campbell’s (1983, 1987) construction of the romantic ethic, in which contemporary consumerism is not motivated by the desire to accumulate things for their own sake, but a means of making real the experience of imagination, to separate oneself from an inevitably rational and utilitarian world. For Campbell, this has its historical roots in the resentment demonstrated by romantic writers and thinkers with the emerging industrial order of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The consumption of books, the gothic and romantic novels of this period, were, for Campbell, central to the spread of such ideas.

The ways in which books can be said to be consumed, though, are problematic and contentious. The act of buying of a book is the start of a process of consumption with different levels of meaning. At the moment of exchange, a book can be seen as just an object or just a commodity. Robert Escarpit (1971) suggests a book ‘becomes’ a book primarily through reading and how books are read becomes a central question. For Campbell, books were amongst the first modern consumer goods that enabled the type of fulfilment of the self that he suggests as central to contemporary consumer ethics. Similarly, for Michel De Certeau, reading can be used as a model for

the experience of consumption more generally. He suggests that, "in a society that is increasingly written...the binomial set production-consumption can often be replaced by its general equivalent and indicator, the binomial set writing-reading." (De Certeau 1984:168) The ability to read, in this schema, comes before and informs the ability to consume. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to adequately summarise the literature that focuses on the process of reading and the particular relationships between texts and authors, some key aspects of this relationship are of use in understanding the history of book consumption. These relate to the process of reading as one of meaning generation, both between the text and the reader and between the text, the reader and the broader social context.

The ability to read is clearly of central importance to the ability to function within the social world and the rise and spread of literacy can be seen as a central, though contested, feature of the Enlightenment project.

Contemporary governmental concerns with illiteracy are tied up with notions of social inclusion, both in the realm of consumption and, through the development of a literate workforce, the realm of production. However, in the context of the consumption of books, 'literacy' is much more than a technical skill. Reading is a particular process, which can be seen as tied up with ideas of self-development. As well as providing the means to operate within the world in a practical way, reading provides a means of interaction with the worlds of art and literature, which, it is assumed, have potentially transformatory effects. As Marx relates buying books to 'being', so the act of reading is seen as an almost magical process that can transport the reader from the workaday mundanities of the world and allows him/her to do the work of self formation, apparently denied through the pressures of the workplace or other commitments. De Certeau suggests that in reading, subjects find "a secret scene, a place where one can enter and leave when one wishes; to create dark corners in which no-one can see within an existence subjected to technocratic transparency." (De Certeau 1984:172)

The temporal and spatial aspects of the process of reading can be seen to contribute to this 'separation'. Reading takes up time and requires a particular orientation to space, which allows the focus of the individual to rest upon the text at the expense of other surrounding physical and social phenomena. According to Escarpit, reading is both social and asocial in that "it temporarily suppresses the individual's relations with his [*sic*] universe to construct new ones with the universe of the work." (Escarpit 1971: 91) Temporally, the association of reading with leisure time, with time 'out' from the workplace, constructs reading as one aspect of re-creation and reproduction. It can be seen as an intimate process in which the relationship between the reader and the text is, temporarily at least, privileged above other relationships. The act of reading itself can be constructed as an assertion of the self above other relationships and a reclamation of time for one's 'own' use that can be empowering. The personal, intimate nature of the process contributes to this. The anthologist and novelist Alberto Manguel's *History of Reading* (Manguel 1997) contains anecdotal evidence of his own experience of this. He describes being 'caught' by his father when furtively studying the sexual and scatological contents of an encyclopaedia, and the realisation that the relationship with the text was his, alone.

"For a moment, I was terrified that he would notice what it is I was reading but then I realised that no-one – not even my father, sitting barely a few steps away could make out what I was being lewdly told by the book I held in my hands and that nothing, except my own will would enable anyone else to know."
(Manguel 1997:12)

The private, intimate aspects of reading place it within a process of negotiation between the individual and the social. Much as awakening someone who is asleep is a particularly intimate act of re-integration into the social world, so the act of reading can be seen as a deliberate attempt to separate oneself from it and interruption of a reader is guarded by social sanction. Commuters reading on public transport can, for example, perhaps

be theorised as clinging on to the 'private' world of consumption as they move towards the public world of the workplace. This type of intimacy lends itself to romantic considerations that the reader's relationship with the book is a relationship with his/her 'true' self, and one that is under his/her own control, a process that can then be more easily understood as potentially transformatory.

This is not a neutral process, though, and is bound up with notions of class and cultural capital. Just as the technical ability to read is not spread evenly throughout a population, so the ability to read in a transformatory way and the potential of reading material to be transformative, or contribute to the development of the self, are managed by the processes of meaning production and competing notions of legitimacy, derived from outside the relationship between the text and the reader. In his historical study of the formation of the reading audience, Klanchener precisely suggests that, "the great illusion about reading that informs the discourse of the romantic imagination: it frees us from a materially intolerable social world." (Klanchener 1987:136) As well as separating the self from the world, reading can in a sense, be seen as a process of 'placing' the self in the world, through the reproduction of certain orientations to cultural and symbolic capital. The following section will develop these ideas by describing competing historical ideological constructions of books and reading. It argues that reading can and has been used as part of a process of resistance that is tied up with notions of the self, self-development and self-assertion. These processes though are not simply liberatory but, just as other types of consumption are bound up with the formation of group identities, reading and book consumption are also implicitly intertwined with processes of class formation and disciplinary control.

Books as Leisure: 'Poisonous' or Improving?

"Learning to read does not necessarily lead to the enjoyment of literature. It is no doubt an absolutely necessary step in that direction but I cannot help thinking, on looking at the results all round and not only among the workmen, that the knowledge and practice of reading make nearly as often for waste of time as for edification."

Lady Bell in *At the Works: A Study of a Manufacturing Town*, 1907: 42.

"Well, you might not agree with what they are reading but at least they are reading and they're not just vegetating in front of the telly every night."²

Contemporary notions of literacy place it at the centre of the formation of a complete citizen or a well-realised subject. Without the technical ability to read, one is potentially excluded from the work force or from engagement with the democratic process – two central platforms for the performance of sociality in contemporary society. Legally enshrined educational initiatives such as literacy hours privilege constructions of reading which emphasise its place in arming subjects for the contemporary world. Underlying such programmes is the assumption that reading is a worthwhile way to spend one's time and, in educational discourse in particular, is preferable to other pursuits. Reading for pleasure can be interpreted as a bulwark against the excesses of modernity, as precisely an escape from the rat race or from the apparently bawdy or vulgar products of 'mass' culture, whilst the notion of a well-read individual is associated with refinement. Historically, though, such a construction of reading was not universally applied. The processes that led to the emergence of mass literacy and popular literature were accompanied by ideological battles over the validity of reading as an appropriate pursuit for all peoples. Prior to the seventeenth century, according to Campbell, "reading

² Interview with bookshop manager 10/5/03. This respondent had been in his position as manager of a chain retail branch in a town centre for three years. He was a graduate in Film Studies.

was seen as strictly a matter of instruction or improvement and all forms of writing were expected to point a moral or serve an obvious and useful end.” (Campbell 1983:290) In a similar way to Elizabethan sumptuary laws that proscribed certain types of consumption to certain privileged social groups, so the spread of reading material was carefully managed and enshrined in law. The assumption of these kinds of governance was that the spread of literacy was precisely a threat to prevailing social orders, both political and religious. Williams (1961) begins his account of the rise of the reading public with the historical record of an act of parliament of 1543 that, “for the advancement of true religion and for the abolishment of the contrarie’, forbade reading any English bible by artificers, journeymen, serving men under the rank of yeoman, husbandmen, labourers and all women other than those of noble or gentle rank.” (Williams 1961: 180) The implication of such an act was that the spread of the technical ability to read should not extend beyond the spread of the ability to read appropriately.

The emergence of a ‘mass culture’, produced as much by the industrialisation of processes of production of reading material as by Enlightenment advances of literacy, and the rise of a literate bourgeoisie, shifted the emphasis in reading material from a strictly ‘utilitarian’ one. The rise of the notion of ‘leisure’, that accompanied the development of industrial society, produced periods of time designed for reproduction and recreation. How this time was spent became the focus of particular struggles, such as those outlined by Thompson (1991). The rise of the novel and particularly its popularity with the women of the emerging and leisured middle class created particular controversy. This kind of reading not inspired by instruction but enjoyed as an experience in itself was considered problematic. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reading and novel reading in particular, was constructed by some as a dangerous threat to the moral fibre of the nation. The threat stemmed precisely from the intimate relationship between the novel and its reader and the apparently transformatory power of the novel’s

narrative, particularly upon its key constituent, the women of the emerging bourgeoisie. It was also linked to the threat of loss of cultural authority of established cultural elites, for whom the novel represented a dilution of the purity of 'higher' forms of written material, particularly scripture, poetry and classical history (Klanichener 1987, Bratlinger 1998). The rise of the novel, encouraged through more efficient means of industrial literary production and through increased literacy, was considered morally dubious because of the form's apparent lack of attention to the imperative to instruct. Instead the aim was to 'entertain' and, like all such leisure pursuits, novel reading was deemed as, at best, a distraction from good works and, at worst, a corrosive influence on impressionable minds. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Seven Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton* cautions that novel reading

"Produces no improvement of the intellect but fills the mind with a mawkish and morbid sensibility, which is directly hostile to the cultivation, invigoration and enlargement of the nobler powers of understanding." (Coleridge, *Seven Lectures*, quoted in Bratlinger 1998: 2)

The rise of a literate 'mass' was greeted with ambivalence by the industrial and cultural elites of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, caught up in the complex and contradictory processes of industrial development. The need for an educated workforce was seen as a central driver of economic growth and also as a means of tempering the potential excesses of mass urban life. Fear of the mob, of Burke's swinish multitude, can also be seen as paradoxically inspiring the emergence of democratic ideals, fostered through the availability of radical literature, such as Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*. Reading, for some benevolent industrialists and philanthropists, still represented the best means to save the 'mass' from itself. The public library movement of the nineteenth century was based upon an assumption that reading of any kind was a more conducive to social order than the potentially chaotic results of too much 'free' time. In his history of public libraries, Thomas Greenwood suggests,

“public libraries are centres of light and not only feed, but create a taste for reading and unquestionably, whatever does this is a benefit to the whole community and aids materially in the repressing and taming of the rougher and baser parts of human nature.” (Greenwood 1890 quoted in Bratlinger 1998:20)

However, the rise of reading as a thing in itself, an experience that focussed upon ‘the self’ in an intimate relationship between text and reader, was, at the same time, constructed by critics of mass literacy to have unwanted side-effects of promoting laziness and filling the minds of workers with immoral, useless or revolutionary thoughts. This made the distribution and consumption of reading a battleground in struggles of discipline and surveillance. Consumers were not to be allowed to consume randomly but their reading was to be shaped and controlled.

The continued survival of the notion of reading for a purpose is of particular importance in understanding the contemporary book trade and the competing meanings associated with the ‘production’ and consumption of its commodities. This will be explored in the context of the working class auto-didacticism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the surprising coincidences between the meanings attached to this activity and more contemporary accounts of book consumption in a later section of this chapter. In terms of the rise of reading as a ‘leisure’ activity, it is interesting to chart the shift from novel reading as threat to the contemporary construction of ‘the novel’ as a central form of ‘high culture’, and of reading in general as a preferable activity to other, apparently corrosive, popular cultural pursuits. Ironically, as Bratlinger points out, many novels of this period are now accorded precisely the kind of reverence that critics accorded other ‘higher’ written products, or alternatively, viewed by more contemporary strands of literary theory as tools of ideological surveillance. Bratlinger suggests though that,

“neither the canonizers ...nor the demystifying critics who treat them as versions of Foucault’s panopticism or of Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatuses are as close to the mark as those earlier critics and moralisers who worried about the de-stabilising, perhaps de-moralising tendencies of fiction.”
(Bratlinger 1998:21)

The following section will attempt to chart one important aspect of this change by focussing on the notion of ‘literature’ and its importance to the understanding of contemporary book consumption and its implicit connection to processes of class formation.

Commodifying respectability: book consumption and class

As Chapter Two demonstrated, consumption is tied up with processes of class formation. Notions of ‘good taste’, for example, have been historically, and remain, part of what McCracken (1988) described as the hidden strategies through which different classes construct their social positions. Notions of good and bad taste are particularly strong when related to the products of culture industries. The processes through which a cultural product must pass to achieve the status of art or literature can be seen to be socially rather than aesthetically derived. The rise of the notion of literature and the selective application of this term by accredited experts in cultural consumption is an important aspect of this process. In Bourdieu’s (1996) terms this can be seen as a shift from cultural to symbolic capital. The former implies access to the technical skills of reading and the means to practise it, whilst the latter implies the ability to put these advantages to a legitimate, i.e. legitimated use. The role of experts in defining and guiding potential audiences for the products of cultural industries becomes crucial. Indeed expertise, expressed through reviews in journals or newspapers or through the interaction of the service encounter, can be interpreted as the finishing touches to the production of cultural artefacts. Bourdieu suggests that cultural production and consumption can be interpreted as a process of initiation and that

“cultural objects, with their subtle hierarchy are pre-disposed to mark the stages and degrees of the initiating process which defines the enterprise of culture...it leads from the illiterate to the ‘literate’ via the non-literate or the common reader to the truly cultivated reader.” (Bourdieu 1984:229)

These different groups are implicitly allied with competing social classes. Aesthetic judgements and judgements of expertise can thus, in part, be interpreted as expressions of power. As De Certeau suggests, “the use made of the book by privileged readers constitutes it as a secret of which they are the true interpreters.” (De Certeau 1984:171)

Whilst not all products of the book industry would be described as literature, this idea provides an interesting route into debates about the relationship between book consumption and the maintenance of social distinctions. In the context of the historical struggles over the validity of certain types of reading material the emergence of the idea of literature, and English Literature in particular, as an object of academic study is an important development. It represents the institutional recognition of some of the strands of romantic thought that emphasised the distinction of certain products of the book industry from the mundane or vulgar world of the market place. As suggested in Chapter Two, the experience of art was, for the romantics, a source of moral renewal in the apparently debased and debasing atmosphere of emerging industrial modernity. In a similar way for the proponents of English Literature, the aesthetic appreciation of literature was a potential source of refinement and improvement in the era of mass literacy and mass culture. This sentiment is enshrined in George Gordon’s oft-quoted remarks in his inaugural lecture as a Professor of English Literature,

“England is sick and English Literature must save it. The Churches (as I understand it) having failed and social remedies being slow, English Literature has now a triple function. Still I suppose to delight and instruct but also and above all to save

our souls and heal the state.” (Gordon quoted in Eagleton 1983: 23)

As well as this institutional aspect (of particular importance given the educational backgrounds of many bookshop workers and the perception of their orientation to books as objects which will be explored in the following chapter) the concept of ‘literature’ provides evidence of the social processes that underline book production and consumption. As Eagleton suggests, “some texts are born literary, some achieve literariness and some have literariness thrust upon them.” (Eagleton 1983:8) In other words, the construction of a particular book as literature is the end of a process of selection and interpretation. In terms of the relationship between book consumption and social class it also marks the beginning of a process of distribution of the work to particular types of audiences. Literature, in Eagleton’s interpretation, can be understood not as an aesthetic or ontological category but as a functional relationship to writing, which shapes and possibly narrows the ways in which we can relate to particular texts. The appreciation of literature is therefore bound up, not just with the recognition of qualities within a text but also with recognition of qualities within the self. In the history of meanings surrounding literature the rise of English at the Cambridge of the twenties and the particular influence of critics such as the Leavises (F.R.Leavis 1933, 1975, Q.D.Leavis 1932, Guillory 1993) in constructing a canon of literary works are of particular importance. In the philosophy of the Leavises, the self can be interpreted as a central concern. It was ‘the thing’ upon which good literature, the consumption of good books, was presumed to act and the right type of literature could thus be assumed to produce the right types of people as part of a civilising process. Eagleton suggests a pre-occupation with the qualities of ‘life’ ran through the journal of the Cambridge literary set and their journal, *Scrutiny*. In this construction ‘life’ was an appreciation of human experience that separated it from the mundane or vulgar workings of the modern world. ‘Life’ was understood as “as remorseless and unquestionable a metaphysical principle as you could wish,

dividing the literary sheep from the goats with evangelical certainty.” (Eagleton 1983: 44) One effect of this type of construction of ‘life’ as a thing experienced through the consumption of literature can be interpreted as the removal of the process of the construction of the self, particularly amongst the educated middle classes, from the processes of production of which they were a crucial part. It removed self-formation from the struggles of capital to the extent that, whilst the self experienced through literature was metaphysical and universal, “it was not clear what side ‘Life’ put you in the General Strike.” (Eagleton 1983:42)

Interestingly, at the same time, in the United States a similar construction of a middle-class ideology centred on the production and consumption of literature was underway. As Rubin (1992), Cotkin (1992) and Lears (1983) suggest, the urban middle classes of America were characterised by a similar ambivalence to emerging mass culture as their British counterparts. The creation of a refined self was considered to be the best defence against the excesses of modern life. This was inspired in part by the Unitarian philosophies of a cultural elite for whom, “one’s obligation was to engage in character development – which they also called a progressive purification of the personality – in order to do divine creation.” (Rubin 1992:5) The notion of ‘taste’ and its expression through the legitimate, correct, acquisition of consumer goods was an important organising principle. This was not inspired through materialistic urges, though. The exercise of ‘taste’, according to Rubin was “supposed to harmonise one’s possessions with one’s true nature – to assist in expressing self control and building character. It was not (at least in theory) a process of amassing these goods solely to impress others.” (Rubin 1992:5)

The consumption of the right sort of books was an important aspect of this, shaped by the guidance of a literary elite. The American equivalent of the Oxford Leavises may have been the critic Stuart Sherman, and the equivalent

of *Scrutiny*, his influential review periodical, *Books*. Through this, Sherman evangelised his 'culture of personality' as formed by literature through selecting books appropriate to the formation of the refined reader for an eagerly aspirant middle-class audience. Rubin suggests that,

"in much the same way Frederic Wilmslow Taylor's ideology of scientific management used the rhetoric of self-fulfilment to organise the individual for industrial productivity, this information served the priorities of a consumer society in which 'using books efficiently' came before the slow accretion of liberal culture."
(Rubin 1992: 70)

These types of constructions of books as 'literature' and reading as a central means of constructing the self in opposition to, or at least separate from, the mundane realities of the modern, rational and industrial world persist in contemporary contexts. These will be explored further in the final section of this chapter relating to bookshop workers and their relationship to customers, and in the following chapter about the book industry as a particular type of production characterised, in part, by its separation from other spheres of production. What the example of literature demonstrates is the means by which book consumption has been constructed as a type of consumption which is particularly centred upon the creation of particular kinds of selves. The 'poisonous' book of the emerging mass culture, constructed as a threat to social orders, is re-cast as an 'improving' book, the experience of which, in the discourse of literary expertise, protects one from new emerging social orders, or at least the perception of them as vulgar and debasing. This process, rhetorically focussed on aesthetic appreciation and inspired by a philosophical commitment to a particular kind of universal human experience, is also bound up with processes of class formation as the boundaries surrounding acceptable reading material are policed. The appreciation of literature is an appreciation of the self and a particular judgement on the non-literary and the selves that might create. The book industry, which of course

produces both literary and non-literary products, finds itself in an ambivalent position in this process, as we shall see.

The idea of literature generated by and for cultural elites is concerned, in Bourdieu's terms, with the translation of cultural capital (the ability to read) into symbolic capital (the translation of this ability into legitimate and legitimated activity focussed around particular types of objects). This can be interpreted as a reaction to the historical processes of the emergence of mass culture. For the middle classes, the focus on the self, realised through the experience of literature, could be interpreted as a means of distinguishing themselves from, and raising themselves above, the 'mass'. The connection of reading with instruction and by extension with self-improvement is made safe, through literature and through the exclusionary codes of appreciation and value. This can be interpreted as a similar kind of exclusionary practices as the use of 'patina' as a demonstration of genuine membership of a class in the face of increased access to consumer goods for a wider audience. Similarly the mass availability of the cultural capital of literacy produced a need amongst privileged groups for the symbolic capital of literature. Carey (1992) describes the emergence of the literary movement of modernism as a particular reflection of this. No sooner had the working classes gained access to literacy, and through Public Libraries and the auto-didactic movement begun to 'move into' and appreciate what was defined for them as 'literature', than the cultural goalposts had moved to the self-consciously inaccessible work of modernism. In his history of the intellectual life of Britain's working classes Rose suggests the effect of this development was to render "the common reader illiterate again and preserved a body of culture as the exclusive property of a coterie." (Rose 2001:394)

The experience of working class consumers of books however cannot simply be reduced to that of exclusion from this closed circle of bourgeois ideology. The rise of the idea of reading, as a recognised past time amongst the

working classes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, may have been treated as a social problem by the cultural and industrial elites of this period but, for the readers themselves, it can be interpreted as an act of resistance. The desire to escape the mass that the rise of reading reflected was not limited to the middle classes, as David Vincent's (1981) social history of nineteenth century working class autobiographers demonstrates. In these accounts, the development of the self is a major motivation for the consumption of books, both as a means of leisure and as a resource for the personal liberation, however temporary, from the experiences of working life. The acquisition of book knowledge became, for these readers, a weapon in their daily battles. In particular, the mastering of the written materials that were perceived as belonging to the upper classes became precisely a means of challenging the inevitability of their structural position. Rose suggests that there was an assumption amongst self-educators, for example, that the class structure, "rested on the presumption that the lower orders lacked the moral and mental equipment necessary to play a governing role in society. By discrediting that assumption, auto-didacts demolished justifications of privilege." (Rose 2001:21)

Vincent provides accounts of readers 'stealing' time to read either at the workplace itself or at the end of the working day. Reading time became separated from the 'real' life of the workplace or of domestic duties, both temporally and spatially. Vincent describes the importance to these readers of declaring a room in the house as being for study or reading. Thus one biographer describes how,

"When I entered that little room at night I was in another world. I seemed to leave all squalor and toil and distraction behind...My life there was strangely and sweetly above what it had been during the day."
From *When I Was a Child by an Old Potter* by Charles Shaw,
London 1903 (quoted in Vincent 1981:122)

Whilst this reading took up what would come to be known as leisure time, the motivation to read can still be interpreted as an extension of working ethics. The great discovery amongst these readers was that knowledge could be 'useful', not in the utilitarian sense but as a means of acquiring knowledge of the material conditions of their own position and possible routes of challenge and change. For these readers, "the discovery of useful knowledge amounted to a secularised conversion experience which left no part of the reader's lives untouched." (Vincent 1981:136)

The inter-relationship between the spread of literacy and the rise of the labour movement (described through such institutions as the Worker's Education Association and, latterly through the popularity of The Left Book Club) suggests a direct relationship between the consumption of books and struggles for recognition and liberation. The consumption of books amongst working class readers, though, was as subtle and complex as that of their middle class counterparts and was as liable to be purely for purposes of leisure and escape as for instruction or inspired by political ideology. One interesting aspect of this is the association of reading as a pursuit concerned with 'respectability'. Vincent describes how having the reputation of being a great reader, "signified an individual who could clearly be distinguished from other working men by his outlook and behaviour, partly as a matter of attachment to the values of rational inquiry and moral improvement." (Vincent 1981:126) Such struggles for self-respect can be both a result of and paradoxically implicit in the class position of these readers.

Whilst accounts of working class self educators romanticise the resistant aspects of their reading, the choice of material and their orientation to it can also be interpreted as a process of 'making' class distinction. There is a perhaps surprising coincidence of meanings between the focus on 'useful' knowledge in the construction of working class readers described by Vincent

and Rose and the interpretations placed on reading by Janice Radway's (1984) ethnographic enquiry into the reading habits of fans of romantic fiction. All three place particular importance on reader's interpretations of their activity as worthwhile. This is of particular interest given the parallel meanings of reading as leisure. Radway interprets the reading of the women of her study as resistant in De Certeau's terms, i.e. a process of reclaiming time and space for women for whom domestic duties in support of their husbands and families limited both. However the readers themselves interpreted their reading as both 'acceptable' leisure (in contrast to the drink or drug use they perceived in other non-reading 'housewives') and as utilitarian instruction, in that the apparently trivial narratives of romance fiction were also enjoyed for their historical or geographic settings. Radway suggests this demonstrate a clash between two value-systems at work in the activity of book consumption.

"One system serves to sustain a consumer-oriented economy, while the other developed by an economy designed to accumulate and concentrate capital tacitly labels consumption for pure pleasure as both wasteful and dangerous." (Radway 1984:116)

By interpreting their reading as educational work they seek to legitimise their uses of their leisure time. Notions of respectability are particularly tied up with discursive formations of class, focussed upon the legitimation of cultural capital and its transformation into symbolic capital. Reading as a 'worthwhile' pursuit places it in a hierarchy over other leisure pursuits which itself is informed by discursive struggles over valid and valuable uses of time. It also reflects the surveillant and disciplinary aspects of consumer practices that tie acts of consumption with the formation of the 'right sort' of selves. These meanings are themselves embedded into class formations. Skeggs suggests that respectability, "is usually the concern of those who are seen not to have it...It would not be something to desire, to prove and to achieve if it had not been seen to be a property of 'others', those who were valued and legitimated." (Skeggs 1997:1) The interpretation of reading as a worthwhile,

or respectable, leisure pursuit adds to the distinction of book consumption as a different form of consumption that informs working practices within the book trade.

Almost evangelism: The book trade and its customers

“You men of wealth would have too many advantages over us poor scoundrels if you could buy in an instant, for a mere sum of money all the store of learning it has taken us so long to collect. If that were so no scholar would venture to contend in erudition with the booksellers, with the vast stores of learning in their possession; but on closer inspection you will find that these worthy persons are no less lacking in discernment than yourself though their days and nights as well are spent amongst books.”

(Lucian in *the Illiterate Bibliomaniac* 5th Century BC, quoted in Mumby 1910:3)

The following chapter will focus on the distinctiveness of the retail book trade as a sphere of production. As we shall see, central to this distinctiveness is a perception that retail work is a particular kind of work done by particular kinds of people. Bookshop work is constructed as somehow different from this, a difference that is informed by questions of skill and respectability, both of which are informed by processes of acquisition and distribution of cultural and symbolic capital. This section will focus on how the book trade in general, and how retail bookshop workers in particular, talk about the customers or consumers of their products and their role in this process. If book production is a particular kind of production, informed by notions of art and creativity, then book consumption is a particular kind of consumption, informed as the above discussion has demonstrated, by notions of self-discovery and self-improvement. As we shall see in a later chapter, the relationship between retail workers and their customers is a crucial variable in competitive retail environments. In the book trade this relationship has particular resonance, as it is not simply about the selling of things but about recognising and empathising with a particular orientation to the self. The selling of books

becomes a means of exchange of symbolically important objects with particular powers. At a session on training and recruitment of bookshop workers at the Bookseller's Association conference 2002, one delegate (an independent bookshop owner) made specific reference to the 'power' and 'value' of the book as an object with almost mystical abilities,

"It can influence the way people feel and think – this can be good and bad. It gives everyone an equal opportunity to increase their knowledge and improve themselves. It can help give understanding and comfort to people who have had bad experiences in life."

In such a light, the book trade is not simply involved in the production and distribution of commodities, bookshops are not simply 'shops' and bookshop workers are more than simply sales people. Rather books are objects with empowering, self-integrating, and following Gordon's prognostication about the 'sickness' of modern society, *healing* abilities and as such the book trade's relationship with its customers is of particular resonance. Historically this relationship has been both one of power based around the shaping of an audience's taste and one characterised by a commercial imperative to sell as many books as possible. Miller (1999) suggests a general movement from a desire to shape the tastes of readers to a rhetorical desire to reflect them, that mirrors the shift from book production as a 'gentlemanly' occupation towards the contemporary site of book selling within corporate chains and large media conglomerates. This shift is, in some senses, reflected in talk with bookshop workers. As part of the interviews workers were asked to reflect on two comments from a text book on how to run a bookshop written by the former president of the Bookseller's Association, Thomas Joy that,

"Bookselling is more than a trade, it is a vocation." (Joy 1974:2)

"Bookshops do more than meet demand, they create it and thus are vital to the cultural welfare of the community" (Joy 1974:13)

These comments produced responses that suggested, in part, that Miller's narrative of change in occupational identity amongst book industry workers was contested. Rhetorically the sentiments of these quotations were rejected as out of step with the contemporary retail environment. At the same time workers had an attachment to the notion of affecting the 'welfare' of the community, expressed through their discussion of the importance of books and reading. Typically workers and managers responded that such a view of the book trade was no use in a contemporary environment. One manager suggested that

"It's such an elitist view and I think an old fashioned point of view that we need to come away from."³

The idea of bookshop work as a vocation and the notions of bookshop work as more than a trade will be explored in subsequent chapters. The place of bookshops in shaping the cultural welfare of the community and the response to this notion as 'elitist' place bookshops, in the view of this manager, within a broader field of power. The need to 'get away' from this can be interpreted as inspired by both a commercial need to expand the market for books and a rhetorical need to promote reading as a worthwhile, or respectable, activity. As the above discussion of historical struggles over the meaning of reading has demonstrated, the audience for books has been constructed as at risk from books as sources of anti-social or radical ideas and in need of guidance to books as a protection from the excesses of modern life. These battles are embedded in class relationships and struggles over cultural authority.

The perception amongst the bookshop workers of this study was of a need to 'demystify' bookshops as potentially intimidating spaces, as part of a process of democratising or flattening out the apparently elitist and exclusionary trade

³ This respondent was manager of a small city-centre branch of a chain retailer with 13 years' experience.

of the past. Central to this was a perception of the audience for books as a particularly narrow but stable group of regular book buyers. Broadly, for the workers in this study, selling books to these customers was pleasurable. Workers, for whom enthusiasm and love of books was a central aspect of their occupational identity, found it easy to relate to like-minded customers, who shared their relationship to cultural and symbolic capital. This allowed for the aesthetic appreciation of certain aspects of their work. A key element to this was the construction of the bookshop worker and their customers as a type of community with shared appreciation of value, such that,

“You are only dealing with book people – you’ve not got a queue behind them waiting to buy their packet of Polos. The people you are talking to are usually crazy on books anyway so you are like minds so you are talking books all the time.”⁴

Success in the contemporary trade, however, was perceived as being built on a chain’s ability to ‘grow the market’ beyond this established and stable core of customers. Terry Maher, former head of the Dillon’s book chain describes the inaccessibility of specialist book retailers (compared to general retailers such as John Menzies or WH Smith’s who also sold books) due to their perceived elitism. Maher describes how,

“Bookshops had a narrow appeal. Most people never entered a bookshop in their lives. There was a feeling within the trade that people who buy books know what they want and know where to find what they want. And the rest didn’t matter.” (Maher 1994:54)

Success depended upon a chain’s ability to broaden that appeal. An experienced bookshop manager who also worked as a consultant to the industry echoes this sentiment when she suggests,

⁴ Interview 11/5/03. This respondent was an assistant manager in a town centre branch of a chain retailer with four years experience.

“what is our responsibility and it’s something like that 80% of the books that are bought are bought by 13 or 15% of the population and all those statistics and this is what I say that your {the bookshop worker’s} responsibility is to increase that to make books more available, to whet the appetite, to have them as something that more people will want, not just those people who read anyhow”⁵

Such constructions of the book-buying audience have historical echoes which are informed by discursive constructions of differences between social classes, mapped onto difference of reading habits. A study of reading by Mass Observation in 1940 concluded that

“Book buyers and members of book clubs are largely middle-class and largely intellectual...That there is a gulf between the types of books read and what reading means to the middle class (especially intellectuals) and working class people is evident especially from the types of magazines stocked in the shops in different districts.” (M.O File Report 37 (March 1940) quoted in McAleer 1992: 6)

Five years later, responding to a call for a ban on works of popular fiction to ease war-time pressure on paper supplies, John Boon of Mills and Boon publishers argued of the need to expand the market for books amongst the working classes, both for commercial reasons and as a contributor to social order. In fact, he suggests

“The dealers in popular books do a service to the trade. They are the missionaries who preach the reading habit. The readers of quality books form a constant group; they are less set in their tastes and less inclined to be distracted by cheap modern entertainments. The popular reader represents what can be called in politics the ‘floating vote’. He (sic) has to be won from the football pools, the dogs, the cinema, the wireless and kindred temptation.” (Boon, A Plague o’ both your houses! *The Bookseller* 18 October 1945 quoted in McAleer 1992: 9)

⁵ Interview 22/1/02. This respondent had over thirty years experience in a number of managerial positions in the retail trade. She was currently employed as a training consultant.

Whilst class is not explicitly mentioned in this construction of the book buying audience, one can clearly interpret the distinction between the readers of quality books as an established, open-minded middle-class intellectual audience and those of popular books, distracted by less obviously edifying pursuits and yet also culturally conservative. The metaphorical allusion to missionary work and preaching places the book dealer as part of a process of 'winning' the souls of a working class audience lost to temptation.

Interestingly, there are echoes of these metaphors in the construction of the contemporary worker and their role in relation to the customer. Whilst workers, managers and directors were quick to distance themselves from descriptions of the modern trade as elitist, there remained an attraction to the notion of promoting reading as a central aspect of the bookshop's role and an important part of the occupational identities of workers. The distribution of the cultural capital of literacy was explicitly linked to a process of promoting the symbolic capital of literature or the right sorts of books. One manager articulates this with another religious metaphor

"It's almost evangelical isn't it – if you like books you want to get them out to people and the way you do it in this day and age, whatever you think of capitalism is through business."

This neatly collates the discourses of anti-elitism with that of commerce. The dominant economic field here allows a space for the operation of the market for symbolic goods. The commercial market place is unproblematically allowed to stand in for the market place of ideas in the democratisation of the bookshop and the book trade when the manager goes on to suggest,

"There's nothing wrong with people reading Catherine Cookson, or even our erotica section or whatever – if that's what people want I don't have a problem with selling it to them. I think the fact that people are reading, even if it is Catherine Cookson, it's a lot more healthy than a lot of other activities."⁶

⁶ Interview 2/5/03. This respondent was manager of a town centre branch of a chain retailer with over twenty years' experience. He was an English graduate.

This manager's laudable rejection of elitism, paradoxically, is drawn from a construction of a hierarchy of value which works as an organising principle in bookshop work. The role of the bookshop and its workers is, in part, to provide for and promote healthy activities. This final comment points to the extent to which the anti-elitist rhetoric of bookshop workers rests upon an unexamined assumption of a cultural hierarchy in which reading is an inherently improving activity. Workers referred to the role of their shops and their chains as promoting reading amongst children, for example, as an indication that their work was not simply driven by commercial imperatives but of broader importance and ultimately of social benefit. At the same time there was a construction of the non-reading public as somehow lacking which seemed to be informed by class distinctions. The call to demystify bookshops, for example, inevitably stems from the association of books with 'mystification', which the audience needed to be reassured about in order to overcome. Workers described how

"We'd get people coming into the shop saying 'can I come in here' because they thought it was part of the library and they weren't allowed in. They can be intimidating places."⁷

Changes to the 'atmosphere' of the bookshop was considered crucial to this process of opening up the bookshop to a broader cross-section of the public and to remove 'stuffy' images that reminded the customer of libraries or schools. The introduction of coffee shops and the playing of music within large chain bookshops can be interpreted as a practical attempt to manage the atmosphere of shops and create a welcoming space for all customers (that the music tends to be jazz or classical though continues to mark the space as distinctive). The bookshop worker plays an important role in this process of demystification, as one worker describes,

⁷ Interview 11/6/01. This respondent was a former manager of a chain retailer who had recently been made redundant. She had nine years' trade experience and was a History and Politics graduate.

“A lot of people walk in, particularly at Christmas time who only come into a bookshop once or twice a year and it’s like me being in a really big wine shop – I don’t know if the wine I want comes from Spain or Italy or the New World – it is really intimidating – so you’ve got to have people around the counter who don’t look scary.”⁸

Throughout this benevolently inspired process of democratisation, a value judgement is being made about the reading and non-reading public. The image, unwittingly perhaps, is of the bewildered non-book buying customer whose life would inevitably be improved if they could be convinced of the validity of reading as a valued leisure pursuit. One worker articulates this through a description of non-readers as inherently inferior or even damaged,

“There are certain people who don’t buy books – they obviously get their entertainment from other sources and I’ve come across people who don’t think about the need to get information - people who when I’ve said that I read a lot say ‘oh, I don’t see what you see in reading and then they ask a question and I know the answer – ‘well how do you know that?’ ‘I read it!’. This sounds a terribly snobbish comment but there are certain types of people who see books as irrelevant to their lives. Now I wouldn’t like to say what’s happened in their lives to make them feel like that.”⁹

Such talk evokes a particular construction of the non-reading public, which can be interpreted as informed by discourses of class distinction. This worker’s reluctance to see her views as ‘snobbish’ denies the extent to which the audience for books and attitudes towards books and reading are products of social and historical processes. Also evident in this talk is the twin meaning of reading as entertainment but also as work.

⁸Interview 11/5/01. This respondent was an English and Philosophy graduate with eleven years’ experience.

⁹Interview 18/4/01. This respondent had five years’ trade experience and was a graduate in Library Studies.

This worker's interaction with these 'certain' people is one in which her apparent mastery of books has been interpreted as giving a key advantage in the general need to get information. Time spent reading is constructed as time spent usefully, whereas time spent on 'other entertainment' does not have the ability to provide useful information and is, by extension, time wasted. The final speculative comment points to a non-book buying audience that is somehow damaged by their lack of appreciation of books and reading.

This chapter has focussed upon the ways in which historical meanings of book consumption, or reading have been bound up in ideological struggles which continue to inform the contemporary reading or consuming experience and are of particular importance in understanding the experience of work in the book industry. Using historical examples and talk from contemporary bookshop workers, it has demonstrated the extent to which the consumption of books can be understood as relating to questions of power, discipline, resistance and to the perpetuation of class distinction. The broad theoretical narrative that this thesis is attempting to assess suggests that 'meaningful' or 'symbolic' consumption is a particularly contemporary phenomenon that allows today's consumers unique access to the means of identity work. The means by which books have been and continue to be consumed and their particular association with notions of self-development, with self-improvement and with questions of status and respectability provides a model for understanding the development of this theoretical narrative. The history of reading and its association with the separation of the self from the material world of production and its implicit association with useful work on the self, place it in a hierarchical position above other types of consumption. Reading and buying books, as we saw in our discussion of Marx, is paradoxically inspired by a need to separate one's 'self' from the perception of a materialistic consumer society that resonates most strongly with Campbell's assertions about the romantic ethic underpinning modern consumer practices. It is thus, a different kind of consumption but one that can be used to

understand and problematise other types of contemporary consumption. For workers in the book industry a distinction between work and consumption as resources for the construction of the self is difficult to make. This is because, as we shall see in Chapter Seven, their enthusiasm for the products that they sell is a key aspect of the development of their occupational identity to the extent that they can be theorised as consuming their work. As well as selling books, they can be interpreted as a key audience for books and as a key resource in the production of meaning around books and reading. The following chapter will explore this idea by focussing upon the book trade as a sphere of production and the particular place of the bookshop worker in this division of labour.

Chapter 6 'A freemasonry of high-brows'?

"Instead of asking what is the position of a work vis-à-vis the production relations of its time I should like to ask: "what is its position in them?"

Understanding Brecht, Walter Benjamin (1973: 87)

This chapter explores the book trade as a sphere of production. It draws on the analysis of data drawn from historical biographical sources, the recent trade press, and interviews with workers in the contemporary book industry in examining the ways in which the book trade constructs itself as a particular and distinctive field of production. It concludes by addressing the book trade's attitude to change, articulated through a discourse of perennial decline. One concern of sociological accounts of the social world is to point out the ways in which social phenomena that appear to be natural and eternal are in fact historical and contingent. This chapter will attempt to treat the bookshop with this kind of critical focus.

Whilst the kind of chain booksellers which are the focus of this research are now a common feature of the contemporary high-street, specialist chain booksellers are a comparatively recent phenomenon. Books, however, have been traded for centuries. Plant (1974) describes the existence of book dealers in Ancient Rome and the central place of the monastery of the Middle Ages in both the production and distribution of printed and bound materials. The division of labour that currently exists in the trade is itself a product of historical processes. The distinction between author, publisher, printer and bookselling firm that characterised the industry throughout the twentieth century has been the result of rationalisation and specialisation – processes that this chapter will argue are on-going. Plant describes how, "the chief continental book producers of the fifteenth and sixteenth century all combined at least the functions of printer, publisher and bookseller, selling at least their own publications at the retail stage." (Plant 1974: 90) Some 'producers' such as Robert Copland, author of *The Seven Sorowes that Women have when theyr husbands be Deade* (1525) combined writing with printing and

distribution. The rise of the e-book and the ability of an author such as Stephen King to bypass publishers and booksellers in the sale of their work suggest a possible return of this phenomenon. At the very least it points out that the development of the division of labour in the production of books is an on-going, fluid process.

Historically, the rise of the corporate or chain bookseller was a phenomenon of the eighties and nineties in the U.K. The rise of the chains was arguably only made possible by the end of the Net Book Agreement which allowed for competition on price in book retail that ultimately made book retail more attractive to City investors (Maher 1994) and more liable to the benefits of economies of scale. Previously books were sold through relatively small, locally run 'independent' bookshops, department stores, large well established shops such as Hatchard's in Piccadilly, London, or through newsagents and stationers. The rise of the chains, along with the influence of new technology such as computerised stock-control systems and on-line retailing add up to a profound period of change in the book industry that inevitably impacts upon workers in this sector. The book trade stands in an ambivalent position towards these changes. It can be seen as engaged in the manufacture and exchange of one of the first commodities with roots in pre-modern times and yet, in its contemporary guise, it can also be described as an immature trade (*the Bookseller* 17/5/02) for whom engagement with processes of massification, commodification and rationalisation produce particular tensions. Whilst, for some, this process of change has been embraced as essential for the continued survival of the book industry, this chapter will attempt to outline the tensions that these changes have revealed in the ways in which the book trade talks about itself, with a particular focus on workers in the retail book industry. It will draw on historical resources of book trade figures to demonstrate that some of the tensions and fears about the contemporary experience of change are a perennial part of the

experience of work in this industry but will also suggest ways in which the contemporary experience might be unique.

Lash and Urry (1994) suggest that a common construction of the contemporary 'culture industries' is that the forces of rationalisation produce a dilution of the essence of the particular product. This view, they suggest typically draws upon Benjamin's notion of the 'aura' of art objects being altered by the imposition of Fordist methods of production and distribution. These rationalised methods of producing art are interpreted as necessarily resulting in homogenised 'mass' culture that threatens an enriching cultural diversity. Narratives of this process in the book trade are not uncommon. Schiffrin (2000) and Epstein (2001) both offer accounts of the effects of the rise of the corporate publisher on the ability of independent publishers to compete, both in the economic market place and, crucially, in the marketplace of ideas. What Lash and Urry suggest is that these accounts, whilst compelling, are based upon a mis-reading of the process of cultural production which has at its heart the myth of the individual creative genius and leads to the conclusion that "culture, which once in a golden past was part of a 'sacred', is becoming more and more like manufacturing industry." (Lash and Urry 1994:123) In this construction of the culture industries, *production* is done by the authors or artists, whilst all other processes that take the product to its audience is unproblematic *reproduction*. In fact, Lash and Urry argue, production in the culture industries has always been collaborative between what, in Fordist terms, would be distinct processes of research and development, design, marketing and supply. As such they suggest, rather than the production of culture becoming more like manufacturing industry, in a post-Fordist context, the reverse is actually true and the "culture industries were post-Fordist avant la lettre." (Lash and Urry 1994:123) Drawing upon Lash and Urry's notion of aesthetic reflexivity as being integral to the formation of contemporary selves, I argue that this narrative of decline in the culture industries is based on a simplistic reading of

Benjamin that fails to appreciate the role of 'aura' of certain objects in perpetuation social identities. Far from being diminished by processes of rationalisation the evidence from talk with bookshop workers will be used to suggest that the 'aura' of books as objects remains central to occupational identities.

The following section examines the book trade as an example of a culture industry, borrowing from Becker's (1982) notion of the Art World and from Bourdieu's (1996) theoretical examination of the field of literary production. This will be followed by a more in-depth discussion of the ways in which the book trade in general, and the retail book trade in particular, articulates the experience of change.

The book trade as 'Art World'

"People do not realise until they get into the trade what's involved. I know I've said to customers it's like a swan beautifully gliding along the surface but underneath you don't know what's involved and the tough paddling that goes on to make sure they get their book."¹

This section will attempt to outline the current division of labour within the book trade and assess the extent to which it can be thought of as what Becker has termed an 'art world'. There are particular difficulties in approaching the 'trade' at this general level, not the least of which is the question of whether or not the book trade deals in 'art' at all. This is not simply a case of debates between high and popular culture but a more subtle question informed by debates around 'authenticity' in production and consumption of goods outlined in the previous chapter. Much as culture is not consumed but appreciated, it is arguably not produced but *created*. However a look at best-seller lists over any recent twelve month period shows a preponderance of titles with neither claim nor pretension to 'art'. The stuff of

¹ Interview with manager of a small city centre branch of a chain retailer. This respondent was a Psychology graduate with thirteen years of trade experience and four years of managerial experience.

popular bookselling is the celebrity autobiography, the movie or t.v. tie-in and the cookery book. Figure 1 illustrates this.

The BookTrack 20 week ending 02/03/02.

NO	Title	Author	RRP	ASP
1	The Woman Who Left	Cox, Josephine	5.99	3.98
2	Lone Eagle	Steele, Danielle	6.99	4.83
3	Harry Potter and the Goblet...	Rowling, J.K	6.99	5.14
4	A Painted House	Grisham, J.	6.99	5.43
5	Delia's How To Cook: Book 3	Smith, Delia	18.99	12.33
6	Harry Potter and The Prisoner of...	Rowling, J.K.	5.99	4.82
7	Harry Potter and the Chamber of...	Rowling, J.K.	5.99	4.83
8	Five Quarters of the Orange	Harris, Joanne	6.99	5.34
9	The Fellowship of the Ring (Tie-in)	Tolkein, J.R.R.	6.99	5.25
10	The Red Room	French, Nicci	6.99	5.09
11	Pop Idol (Tie-in)	Pattenden, Sian	7.99	7.33
12	The House on Lonely Street	Andrews, Lyn	5.99	4.28
13	A Minor Indiscretion	Matthews, Carole	5.99	4.24
14	The Highway Code	DSA	1.99	1.55
15	Having it and Eating it	Durrant, Sabine	5.99	4.41
16	The Two Towers (Tie-in)	Tolkein, J.R.R.	6.99	5.21
17	Blood Hunt	Rankin, Ian	5.99	4.03
18	Tell No-one	Coben, Harlen	5.99	4.26
19	True History of the Kelly Gang	Carey, Peter	7.99	6.15
20	Northern Lights	Pullman, Philip	5.99	5.16

Figure 1. A bestseller chart, including 3x Harry Potter, 1x Cookery Book, 2x Film Tie-in (Lord of the Rings), 1x TV tie-in (Pop Idol) and The Highway Code.

Despite this, there is evidence from the trade press and from talk with bookshop workers that there is a particular construction of the book as a particular type of cultural product with resonance beyond its commodity status. If books are informed by a discourse of distinction in which they stand hierarchically above other less 'pure' types of products, then work in this industry might also be informed by this distinction. This produces evident tensions between the status of the book as a cultural artefact and a commodity. The retail trade is driven by commercial imperatives to sell more books. The end of the Net Book Agreement and the rise of the chains have made these imperatives more pressing as large book selling chains float on the stock-market. This kind of pressure informs this comment from the trade press that

“Just because the product the trade deals in is an accepted art form does not mean that, when it comes to commerce we should all wear hair shirts.” (*The Bookseller* 8/3/02)

This comment clearly suggests a need to embrace commerce, yet it also hints at the presence of reluctance to do so that can be related to the competing pressures of cognitive and aesthetic reflexivities. Whilst workers in this industry might be required to take account of rational concerns, they also draw upon discourses of aesthetics, based on notions of aura and orientations to the self with roots in romanticism. These competing pressures produce tensions which necessarily produce ambivalence to the market place.

Becker's (1982) notion of the Art World suggests that cultural production is based upon the myth of the artist as the sole producer. Central to this myth is the notion that artists or authors are not subject to the mundane constraints of ordinary producers. Thus artists are typically constructed as individuals who are more able to flout or challenge established moral or ethical codes. More crucially for this discussion though, they are also considered to be free from the material constraints which necessarily lead other social agents to sell their labour to satisfy material needs. Eagleton, discussing the production of literature suggests that, “imaginative creation can be offered as an image of non-alienated labour...in contrast to the fragmented individualism of the capitalist market-place; it is spontaneous rather than rationally calculated, creative rather than mechanical.” (Eagleton 1983: 20)

For Becker, a sociological approach to the production of art must emphasise the different social relations in which the producer of a work is embedded, to the extent that the notion of a single producer of a work becomes meaningless. Becker uses the example of film credits to imply that, whilst the authorship of a film is often awarded to an individual director or producer, a whole series of skilled, crucial tasks are undertaken by a significant number of

support workers – over sixty in his example of a particular film. Crucially for this thesis he omits a level of support workers included in the distribution of a film to the consumer, notably the technicians, projectionists etc. and the cinema management and attendants, the work of all of who is integral to the experience of the consumer of the product. In the book trade a list of potential support workers might be equally long. Figure 2 illustrates this, representing the twenty-two workers involved in the selection, purchase and promotion of the range of stock for a particular chain bookseller.

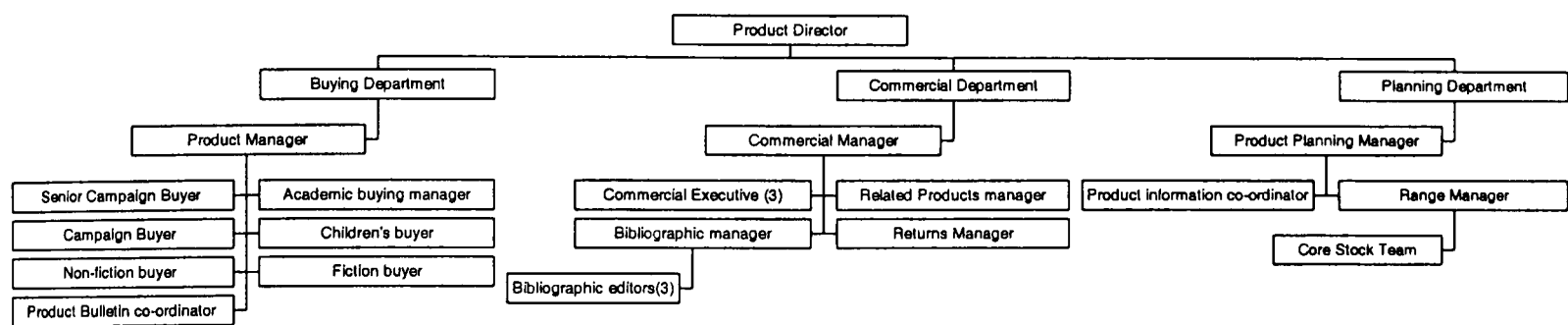


Fig.2 ‘The Product Department’ at the head office of a large chain bookseller. Adapted from *The Bookseller* 7/6/02

Becker also emphasises the extent to which the systemic arrangements for the production of ‘art’ are not natural or eternal but appear to be so to those who work in these industries. He suggests that, “each kind of person who participates in the making of art works has a specific bundle of tasks to do. The people involved typically regard the division of tasks as quasi-sacred and inherent in the medium.” (Becker 1982:13) This division can be simplistically summarised as author, publisher and bookseller but these distinctions and the relationships between these ‘sectors’ are both contested and complex.

According to Frederic Warburg, founder of the Secker and Warburg publishing firm,

“The raw material of publishing is unpublished books. It is writers who are the kings and queens of the publishing trade; the publishers are the knaves.” (Warburg 1959: 152)

Whilst this construction of the division might not be accepted uncritically by more contemporary workers in publishing, it points to a particular relationship as central to the production of a work. The author *creates* whilst the publisher *selects* between unpublished works of differing levels of merit. These divisions are constructed as inevitable and eternal despite their place in historical processes and the possibility of future disruption. Talking about the possibility of e-publishing allowing authors as producers a more ‘direct’ relationship with their consumers, Jason Epstein, a former editorial director of Random House insists that,

“Authors will always need editorial valets to polish their syntax and replenish their purses, share their joy and submerge their own egos for the sake of their author’s fame.” (Epstein 2001: 37)

The criteria for this relationship in this kind of construction echoes Becker’s construction of the ‘quasi-sacred’ division of labour, not least because it obscures the profane aspect of it, i.e. that it is one driven, in part at least, by commercial imperatives and affected by other material pressures. It obscures for example the relationship with other technical and skilled aspects of production, such as the manufacture of paper and ink as well as typographical and printing skills. These more mundane, or profane, processes are central to the production of books but less integral to the discourse of production centred on the creative writer. McAleer (1992), for example, describes the impact on book production brought about by the rationing of paper during and directly following the war. With the supply of their raw material restricted, printers were more inclined to produce works more likely to give a good return in terms of sales, producing a growing number of sensationalist fiction titles. Narratives of cultural change based upon the myth of the creative genius might interpret such a phenomenon as reflecting an

inevitable cultural decline, resulting from massification and the influence of Fordist methods of creative production. An emphasis on production, rather than 'creation' might interpret it as an inevitable result of changes in the material supply of goods.

Book supply depends upon the fluid interaction between a whole number of disparate groups. The physical act of production involves authors, publishers (including commissioning editors, proof-readers and agents, designers, marketing professionals), printers and paper manufacturers, supply chain workers, warehouse and stock management operatives. The supply of books to shops requires the interaction of logistics firms, wholesalers, haulage companies, postal workers, sales representatives and as we shall see in the final section of this chapter, increasingly the use of technology and the associated support professionals of this field. Bookshop workers are intimately bound up in this process. One former bookshop worker and manager, working as a consultant to the retail trade described the bookshop worker's role thus,

"You're part of the package, the production of the book, the writer. Because we're the last part in the chain from the author to the reader and for me that's the most important."²

As well as the physical unpacking of books and shelving, bookshop workers are also involved in 'merchandising' and display of books in shops, ordering and re-ordering stock. Publishers actively attempt to co-opt bookshop workers to the cause of particular titles through the provision of free 'proof' copies of forthcoming titles and through involvement in promotional activities. Generating bookshop worker enthusiasm has become a central tool in the marketing of successful titles. The particular meanings associated with these

² Interview 22/1/02. This respondent was a respected book trade figure with over thirty years' experience including managerial positions in large central London retailers.

different aspects of the bookshop worker role and the affect upon it of recent changes in the book trade will be examined in more depth later.

These various groups all have differing, sometimes contradictory interests in the success of the book trade. The quest for profitability is, as with any commercial operation, a central concern. The peculiar symbolic resonance of books as 'art' and the association of this as separate from the marketplace produces recurring tensions, notably between books as commodities to be bought and sold and books as repositories of cultural capital. Neither commercial pressures nor cultural ones are, however, the exclusive concern of a particular sector of the trade. Writers, publishers and book retail firms and workers can be seen to communicate contradictory messages about the place of profit and material reward in their respective enterprises. Bourdieu (1996) explains this through the position of what he terms the 'field of literary production' within the broader field of relations of production. The following section will examine the ways in which the trade in general and bookshop workers in particular negotiate the ambivalence of this position.

'Books are different'

"Profits and orderly procedures, to the extent that they can be achieved are essential to the work but they are not its purpose any more than breathing is the purpose of life or a scorecard is the purpose of a tennis match."

Book Business, Jason Epstein (2001:37)

Bourdieu's *Rules of Art* attempts to map the 'field of literary production' and the position of both the workers in this field and the products of this field in a wider context of capitalist relations. It attempts to outline the tensions which emerge between different types of capital, most notably the 'symbolic' or 'cultural' capital associated with particular works and the economic capital which ultimately governs and restrains their production. Bourdieu draws his model of analysis of this field from Flaubert's novel *A Sentimental Education*

and in particular from the character of Arnoux, an art dealer in eighteenth century Paris. Bourdieu draws from this figure a compelling picture of work in the culture industries based upon an inherent tension in the production and trade of 'art'. The seller of 'art', Bourdieu suggests, has a certain cultural cachet, compared to other types of sellers through the association with symbolically important things but is cursed, "to appear to artists as a bourgeois and to the bourgeois as an artist." (Bourdieu 1996:8)

For Bourdieu the market for symbolic goods is informed by two antithetical logics. The first is driven by a quest for short term profits in which success is measured by such criteria as the length of a print run or the number of sales of a particular artifact. The second is measured by symbolic profits procured through the long-term accumulation of cultural capital. The presence of these two logics produces ambivalence to the market place and to commercial success. For some involved in the trade of art or culture, motivated by the first logic, the aim is to make "the trade in cultural goods just another trade." (Bourdieu 1996: 42) This is a particularly relevant shift to the contemporary retail book trade, especially following the kinds of change (the end of the Net Book Agreement, the 'rise' of the chains) outlined above. This has produced a discourse about the distinctiveness of the trade and its difference from other types of retail, which feed into notions of decline explored below. For those motivated by the second logic, short-term material success is "rejected as evidence of mercenary interest in economic profits." (Bourdieu 1996: 218) Bourdieu suggests that the production of symbolic goods is, for some in this field, a charismatic economy which proves the authenticity of the products it generates precisely because they secure no immediate remuneration. The reward here is the deferred accumulation of cultural capital made possible through the association with goods that survive within the market place of ideas. One bookshop manager described workers in the trade in these terms when he suggested,

“I think people who read books a lot are a bit odd aren't they?
It's people who are slightly apart from the mainstream in general
really...they are not into making loads of money and having a
big house – they are more thoughtful people, less materialistic.”³

The existence of the field of literary production as a sub-field of production however means that most workers in these industries are caught between these logics. Each enterprise, be it publishing, printing or retail book selling might be informed by the anti-economic logic that associates their production with an economically disinterested cultural or symbolic market place. They are however required to behave commercially to ensure their own survival. For Bourdieu, the result of this tension is that the only way members of this field “can combine the economic profits of an ordinary economic enterprise with the symbolic profits assured to intellectual enterprises is by avoiding the crudest forms of mercantilism.” (Bourdieu 1996: 142) In the retail book trade, particularly in chain book selling, the added pressure of shareholders demands for dividends places particular emphasis on profitability within shops. A manager describes the ‘balancing act’ between the two logics thus,

“I have to ensure we buy in at a reasonable margin so that at the end of the year we turn in a profit. I don't think the staff here would be naïve enough to say that we shouldn't be doing that but there is freedom to buy in books that are not going to make much money because they are funded by books that do turn in a high profit.”⁴

The notion of naïvety here evokes the inevitable pressure of the economic logic, whilst the notion of freedom, and its association with books that do not ‘make much money’, suggests other pressures related to the disinterested second logic. Another manager echoes this sentiment, suggesting,

³ Interview 3/5/01. This respondent was an English graduate with over twenty years of experience in various positions in the retail book trade. He was interviewed as a manager of a large town centre branch of a chain retailer.

⁴ Interview 12/4/01. This respondent was manager of a city centre branch having worked in the retail book trade for twenty years.

“Catherine Cookson pays our wages but it also allows us to stock things that are worthwhile selling that aren’t rubbish. We’ve got our share of rubbish and that keeps us going – we’re not snobby about it but one pays for the other.”⁵

This also indicates the extent to which bookshop work is not simply concerned with a rational or calculating approach to the selling of objects. This manager clearly associates herself with the product and makes distinctions between different types of books, some ‘rubbish’, some ‘worthwhile’. Whilst she defensively suggests a lack of ‘snobbery’, this type of distinction is informed by discourses of cultural capital. Whilst such views might be expressed as personal taste, following Bourdieu (1984), they also act to ‘classify the classifier’ constructing the bookshop worker as a particular type of person with an orientation to particular aspects of the products, including their lack of commercial success.

The discourse of bookshop work as ‘different’ has a history that pre-dates the recent changes in the structural organization of the book trade. Former president of the Bookseller’s Association Thomas Joy wrote in his ‘text-book’ of book-selling published in 1974,

“The selling of books ranks with the highest intellectual pursuits and good salesmanship entails much more in book-selling than in many other forms of retailing.” (Joy 1974:61)

Despite the changes experienced in the book industry in the last decade or two that might have been expected to rationalize or level out this difference, talk with workers in the contemporary industry suggest that, discursively at least, it retains an important part in the formation of occupational identities. There are two overlapping aspects of difference of interest here. Firstly, following from the model of work in the culture industries suggested by Bourdieu, the extent to which bookshop workers see the product that they sell

⁵ Interview 19/4/01. This respondent had been manager of this medium sized town centre branch of a chain retailer for four years having previously worked in the book trade for eight years.

as different from other products (and how this difference is represented) and secondly the difference of bookshop workers from other types of retail worker. The two aspects are overlapping because of the centrality of a love of books (a judgement based upon aesthetic rather than cognitive or 'rational concerns) to the occupational identity of the bookshop worker and through the perception that bookshop work is more than just selling. As part of the interviews, respondents were asked whether or not they considered their skills to be transferable to other types of retail or service work and, if so, if they had considered working in other sectors of retail in the past. Whilst some respondents recognized the transferability of technical aspects of their skills (such as the ability to work a till, manage stock or staff and engage with customers) most rejected other retail work. One manager claimed

"I don't want to sell – it's an awful word – another 'product'. I enjoy selling books and managing people who sell books"⁶

The reasons for this rejection of retail were assumptions about what general retail involved and a perception that the selling of books was a more complex process that both required greater skills and ultimately had a particular kind of impact. Thus, as one worker described it,

"I think it's the same in terms of the nitty-gritty, like product comes out, product is stocked, product is sold, product is returned if unsold but there is a sense of doing something worthwhile as opposed to selling cans of beans."⁷

The notion of the work and the products being 'worthwhile' was a recurring theme. Why the products were 'worthwhile' was harder to ascertain, the most common responses being "because its books". One manager, though, attempted to explain that.

⁶ Interview 12/4/01. City centre branch manager with twenty years of experience.

⁷ Interview 17/4/01. This respondent was an English graduate who had been in his position since leaving university, four and a half years ago.

“We’re dream traders, we sell escapism and non-fiction to people who want to achieve their dreams”⁸

The reluctance or inability of bookshop workers to elaborate on the ‘worth’ of their trade can be related to the unexamined assumptions underlying the construction of books informed by the place of workers in relation to cultural capital. It is also related to ambiguous and contradictory feelings about the respectability of retail work in general and bookshop work by association. Both these points relate to the distinction of the type of person employed in the trade.

Bookshop workers had a perception that their work was more complex than that of other retail. Work undertaken in stock management, which is typically allocated on a section by section basis to individual bookshop workers, was seen to require particular skills with no obvious counterpart in ‘ordinary’ retail, which was perceived as ‘just standing behind a till all day’. The knowledge of the terms and conditions of dealing with publishers and wholesalers and the importance of maintaining margin between cost and retail price was cited, even at the entry-level of bookshop work, as an important aspect of the worker’s skill. Alongside this technical level of expertise was the role of the worker in guiding a consumer. This was based upon the knowledge of what’s published gained through the examination of the trade press. The number of lines of stock, i.e. the vast number of books published every year and the ability to select knowledgeably from these on behalf of the customer, was central to this skill and to the perception of difference

“It’s just the fact you’ve got so many individual items to sell. When you go into a supermarket, there’s hundreds of tins of beans but you’ll just have one book on some things, so it does require a great deal of expertise.”⁹

⁸ Interview 12/4/01. Manager of a large city centre branch, twenty years of trade experience.

⁹ Interview 3/5/01 Manager of a large branch in a town centre, twenty years of trade experience.

As well as technical knowledge, though, the difference was expressed through a more ephemeral sense of 'trust' based upon a perception of them as accredited experts, by virtue of their position. This entailed a particular relationship with the customer which one worker reported as

"They expect to be able to come in with half the details of a book and you'd be able to figure out what it is and often you can. I think they expect us to have read most of the new books that are out there and expect us to have opinions on them."¹⁰

This expertise does not stem simply from technical 'product knowledge' but from an oft-cited enthusiasm or passion for books, which bookshop workers were able to utilize in the day to day performance of their role. This kind of orientation and rationalisation of individual worker's emotional attachment to the things that they sell was a contested aspect of the experience of bookshop work, which will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Seven, linked to recent sociological debates about 'emotional labour' and the position of the 'self' in interactive service work. In terms of the construction of the bookshop worker's role in the production and supply of books a love of books or a feeling for books was a contested quality. Workers cited it as a central quality, whilst managers used it as a guide in the recruitment and selection of bookshop staff. Being a 'well-read' person was considered to be an important aspect of the worker's role, which extended beyond a technical appreciation of books in stock in dealing with customers, into the realm of communicating and expressing one's personal tastes. Workers saw themselves as expert consumers, able to communicate their expertise to grateful customers. A worker suggests that a 'genuine' appreciation of 'books' (as opposed to one based upon or informed by commercial imperatives of individual shops) is crucial,

¹⁰ Interview 11/5/01. This respondent was an English and Philosophy graduate with eleven years of experience working in various branches of a chain retailer.

“You can have all the ‘blurbs but you can’t beat actually speaking to someone who has read it...I think you need to genuinely enjoy books. I don’t think you can really fake it, I don’t think that works because people can tell.”¹¹

These different levels of expertise informed the notion that bookshop work was somehow more skilled and more complex than work in other types of retail. However, alongside this kind of construction was a parallel and contradictory idea that the work was somehow not valuable precisely because it was ‘shop work’. Whilst bookshop workers felt that their knowledge and enthusiasm for books was appreciated by customers, when asked if they felt that their work was a ‘respected occupation’, responses were less positive. Whilst a lack of respect was partly down to a lack of appreciation of the complex processes involved in stocking a bookshop, more broadly it was because of a perception of shop work in general.

“I don’t think it’s respected because, well, you work in a shop don’t you and I don’t think people think you are very clever if you work in a shop.”¹²

This kind of resentment stems from the kind of ambivalence to the market place described by Bourdieu as typical of members of the field of literary production. The recognition of individuals as well read does not simplistically represent a reflection of the volume of books that an individual has consumed. Rather it represents a value judgement of the books themselves, which is informed by mutual recognition of differing levels of cultural capital. Whilst managers and workers were quick to defend themselves against accusations of elitism or snobbery, the broadest definition of well-read was based upon an intrinsic value of the act of reading towards contributing to a type of person more suited to work in the bookshop environment. One manager described the ‘click’ point in an interview as when,

¹¹ Interview 17/4/01. English graduate with four and a half years of experience in the retail book trade at the same town centre branch.

¹² Interview 25/4/01. This respondent was a Library and information studies graduate with 6 years of experience.

“You find someone is genuinely passionate. It might be they read, it might be they write or review or anything else but they’ll have an engagement...if they don’t have that they are not worth having in a bookshop”¹³

The construction of certain people who have an ‘engagement’ with the product becomes problematic given the sources of this ‘orientation’. Mutual recognition of the value of certain objects can be seen to reflect mutual levels of accumulation of cultural or symbolic capital. For Bourdieu, these types of capital, like economic capital, contribute to the formation of and reflect social class. Whilst cultural capital can be inherited through the membership of established social classes, it can also be accumulated, most obviously through state education. Whilst ‘well-read’ and ‘educated’ are not equal categories the appearance of a ‘cultured’ or refined individual is one historically associated with the middle classes. The appreciation of books is equally not an orientation spread equally throughout a population. The notion of bookshop workers as different is, in part, informed by this. Recruitment of staff is informed by these discourses of social and cultural distinction. One bookshop manager commented in a recent trade press enquiry into the ‘problem’ of recruitment,

“Historically we never touched the job centre because the type of person walking in there, would not, we thought, be intellectually up to the task of working in a bookshop” (quoted in *the Bookseller* 5/4/02 p.21)

In terms of recruitment a contested area in the contemporary discourse of the book trade is the viability of attracting university graduates into the trade and the status of retail bookshop work as a profession. The status of the bookshop worker as ‘just a shop worker’ and the relatively low pay on offer in the retail and service sectors has led to recent industry debate about the

¹³ Interview 19/12/00. This respondent was a former branch manager of a chain retailer who was working on developing their website.

ability of the retail book trade to attract and retain 'quality' candidates, which can be broadly interpreted as 'graduates'. Of the people interviewed in this study, six were not university graduates. Of these one was an experienced bookshop manager and trainer who had completed an 'apprenticeship' in book selling on continental Europe, one had begun but not completed a university course and subsequently risen from shop floor work to a junior management position, three had gained vocational qualifications in unrelated fields but had 'chosen' bookshop work as an attractive career change. The final non-graduate had again risen through the trade to be a manager at two large branches of a major chain. At the other end of the educational scale, three of the respondents had completed post-graduate qualifications, one in teaching and two in areas of the humanities. One worker explained the prevalence of well-educated staff thus,

"A high percentage of booksellers are graduates even though you wouldn't necessarily have to be a graduate to do the job. I think because you are working with books and around books and sometimes with publishers I think you're naturally geared towards that."¹⁴

The attraction of the trade to graduates was explained through a perception of the relationship between university study and a particular orientation towards books and learning. Most graduate respondents who reported their degree qualification were in the Arts, Humanities or Social Sciences – literature-rich subjects that might train a particular orientation to books and reading. Such educational experience would certainly contribute to recognition of an orientation to certain books as a marker of distinction. The perception of distinction of work in the trade informed by a discourse of mutual recognition of the value of books as markers as cultural capital was talked of as a help in the attraction of workers to the retail trade. On behalf of existing workers, though, it was also a source of particular resentment as the day to day

¹⁴ Interview 17/4/01. English graduate with four and a half years of experience working for a town centre branch of a chain retailer.

working of the role problematised this distinction. Bookshop workers with a graduate background recognized that their experiences and education were, to some extent, put to good use in the complex workings of the book retail trade. As well as working with products with which they were intellectually engaged they were given a degree of autonomy and responsibility, even at entry-level. The experience of this was compromised by the mundane day to day reality of work in a retail environment. Given the distinctiveness of the trade and the distinctiveness of workers in the trade, this was experienced as a kind of vicious circle. Workers were attracted in through the symbolic resonance of the product and their association with the market place of ideas rather than the commercial market place. The lack of material reward was cited as a major disadvantage of a career in this industry but the cultural connotations of an association with symbolically important things allowed bookshop workers to negotiate these tensions, at least in the short-term. Whilst retention of staff was cited as a particular problem, there was a perception of an over supply of willing workers, attracted by the perception of bookshop work as a particular kind of working environment. One manager explicitly made this point when he suggested,

“Every year all the universities produce x thousand arts graduates who come knocking on my door willing to work for what used to be £6,000 a year. You tell me why a company should pay more if its not going to get any better staff for that money.”¹⁵

This kind of perception of the job market for bookshop workers points to a tension between the two ‘logics’ outlined in the field of literary production by Bourdieu. That workers would forego material reward for the attraction of cultural cachet is of use to employers within the book industry as a means of keeping wages low. Equally though, there is an accompanying discourse of the ‘type’ of person who works in the trade as not simplistically motivated by

¹⁵ Interview 19/12/00. Former branch manager currently working developing the web business of a chain retailer.

material reward. This is complicated by recent changes in the trade, most notably the end of the Net Book Agreement and the rise of the corporate book-selling firm, the particular impacts of which will be discussed in the following section.

For bookshop workers the distinctiveness of the trade is experienced as a means of classifying themselves as engaged in a 'profession' that is more than simply the buying and selling of goods. This is based upon an appreciation of books as particular types of symbolic commodities associated with the accumulation of cultural capital. Thus one worker is able to perceive a hierarchy of retail in which

“if you put people from retail in a line I think people would put booksellers higher up – it’s really snobby isn’t it – but yes I think bookselling is a better, more exalted kind of selling job.”¹⁶

The distinction is articulated through reference to other types of products, such as baked beans, which are more simplistically reduced to the level of commodity. It also based upon a perception of themselves as a group of educated workers engaged in a sector of the service economy which required particular orientations and skill. This perception was articulated through reference to other types of retail, which were seen not to require these orientations. The similarity to other, less exalted, types of retail required a negotiation between the cultural capital rewards, accumulated through their association with books, and the lack of material reward that necessarily followed work in retail. One worker described this succinctly,

“They’ve got you over a barrel really. They know people like me won’t go and work in Tesco’s for a quid more an hour.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Interview 11/5/01/. An English and philosophy graduate with eleven years of trade experience.

¹⁷ Interview 16/11/00. This respondent was a fine art graduate, who also had a teaching qualification. She had been working in a city centre branch of a chain retailer for one year.

Both these distinctions can be seen to stem from the tensions that emerge in the market place for symbolic goods. As such they can be constructed as a perennial part of the discursive terrain of the retail book trade. The following section will examine some of the changes affecting the trade in recent years and argue that they have made these tensions more difficult to negotiate at the bookshop worker level.

Change and decline?

“Bokes be not set by: there time is passed, I gesse;
The dyse and cards, in drinking wyne and ale,
Tables cayles and balles, they now be sette a sale.
Men let theyr children use all such harlotry,
That byenge of bokes they utterly deny.”

Robert Copland, prologue to *The Castell of Pleasure* (1518)

“More and more telly, more and more choice on telly, DVDs, Sony Playstations all sorts of rubbish. I think books are becoming less fashionable.”¹⁸

The discursive terrain of the booktrade is characterized by a prevailing tension between the romantic construction of books as culturally enriching objects and commodities to be bought and sold like any other. In the working environment of the book trade, across its different sectors these tensions can be seen as central to the ways in which workers talk about what they do. Whilst precise orientations do the different imperatives of the trade are not spread equally across the sectors, workers in each sector are aware of these tensions and use them in their representations of their roles. This contributes to the construction of the ‘difference’ of the trade. Successful book selling can be constructed as a mixture of achieving financial stability and contributing to

¹⁸ Interview 15/1/02. This respondent had three years’ trade experience and had been working as an assistant manager in a large town centre branch of a chain retailer for four months. She had a post-graduate qualification.

a process of cultural enrichment rather than simply maximizing economic return. Recent changes in the book trade, most notably the end of the Net Book Agreement and the rise of the chain bookseller, have been represented within the trade as placing particular emphasis on the 'economic' logic in the market for symbolic goods. This is perceived as due to both increased competition within the book-selling sector itself, requiring firms to 'compete' to 'survive', and also due to competition from outside the book-selling sector from other consumer goods. Bookselling is situated in both 'the market-place' of ideas and the broader market place, leading one manager to suggest that its competitors were,

"the leisure industry – playstation games, it's records. We actively compete with these people – we want them to come and buy a book rather than a pair of jeans."¹⁹

Changes in the book trade can be interpreted as evidence of commercial attempts to make the trade in books the same as any other trade. The perpetuation of discourses of distinction though makes such an explanation problematic. If engagement with bookshop work is inspired by discourses of their 'worth' and connection to cultural capital, changes in the organisation of the book trade that privilege commercial concerns necessarily produce tensions and contradictions within the discourse of the trade. However, a subtler layer of meaning associated with books also underpins the particular changes of the last two decades. When bookshop workers talk of their work as worthwhile they connect with discourses of books as repositories of ideas, as markers of cultural capital but also as sources of their selves, their individual identities. The worth of books relates to their connections with citizenship. Notions of literature and art connect to the construction of a romantic self which stands "in opposition to the factitious values thrown up by the market and similar operations of society." (Williams 1990:34) Whilst the

¹⁹ Interview 3/5/01. This respondent had twenty years' trade experience and had been working as manager of a town-centre branch of a chain retailer for four years.

book trade feeds off these kind of constructions of its work in emphasising its difference, it inevitably produces ideas of isolation or distance from the modern, or post-modern, world that produces a discursive trait of permanent decline in the face of apparently inevitable pressures.

One aspect of this is the historical representation of the booktrade as an occupation for gentlemen. The notion of book production and sales being a more complex and more meaningful process than the production and sale of other commodities has historical roots that relate to the social position of those engaged in the trade. This notion also relates to the emergence and rise of trade as the dominant form of activity of the middle-classes in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain. The Janus-faced approach to modernity described by Weiner (1981) as typifying the British merchant class is echoed in the book trade. For Wiener, the gentleman industrialist was required to serve both the interests of the market and of the established aristocratic social order. Thus, material growth was checked by “contrary ideals of stability, tranquility, closeness to the past and non-materialism” (Wiener 1981:6). If, in Wiener’s schema, the market represented a threat to the prevailing social and cultural order, so in the book trade an increased emphasis on the commercial at the expense of the cultural compromises the uniqueness of the trade and, importantly, compromises the cultural influence and authority of those working in the book industry. This is a recurring theme of book trade discourse which pre-dates, but has resonance with, current changes. Coser et al. cite a reviewer from *Publisher's Weekly* in 1890 as reflecting that,

“If literature and art are to be treated as common merchandise...it will make common-place the manners of our people and their intelligence restricted to the counting room.”
(Quoted in Coser et al. 1982:18)

Changes to the book trade are often interpreted as threats to its survival, which can in turn be seen as evidence of ambivalence to modernity. What is

at stake in these discursive struggles is the authority of workers in the book trade over the products that they sell and the distinctiveness of their perceived relationship with the consumer. Just as mass literacy was perceived as a threat by a cultural elite to a prevailing social and cultural order, so, following Lash and Urry's construction of the impact of 'Fordism' on cultural production, massification and rationalisation of the book trade have been spoken of as threats to the cultural essence of the trade. If the book can be considered, following Benjamin, as an object with a particular aura, then these processes can be interpreted as detaching the object from the "domain of tradition" (Benjamin 1999: 215) from which it derives this aura.

These points can be illustrated through reference to book trade discourse and the talk of bookshop workers about three overlapping changes that have affected the industry in the last thirty years, all of which have in some sense contributed to a challenge to the cultural authority of the book trade and thus the occupational identities of book trade workers. These changes are the rise of the chains, the increased use of technology (both in controlling stock and as a means of selling books through internet shopping) and, arguably the catalyst to the increased pace of both these changes, the end of the Net Book Agreement. This most explicitly compromised the distinctiveness of books as a commodity by removing protection from the market place.

The very existence of such legally enshrined protection of books from the rigours of competition was a tacit acceptance on the behalf of legislators that the book industry served particular purposes beyond purely commercial concerns. Legislation to protect book from the market reflected, according to Miller, "the special role of the book market in the culture and the special value of the book as a cultural object." (Miller 2001:17) In the UK, legislation to protect the prices of books stemmed from agreement between the Associated Booksellers of Great Britain and the Publishers' Association over the need to maintain the profitability of books. Excessive competition between publishers

and booksellers was considered to be detrimental to the trade as a whole. The Society of Authors proclaimed in 1897 that,

“Many books cannot claim to be published until the booksellers are interested in them; and no bookseller will be interested in a book unless he gains a fair profit from selling it.” (quoted in Joy 1974:24)

The 1957 version of the Net Book Agreement was upheld, following legal challenge in 1962, precisely because of the need for books to contribute to a vibrant and varied democratic culture, which opening up books to the market place was perceived to compromise. The Restrictive Practices Court Ruling declared that,

“the abrogation of the agreement would result in fewer and less well-equipped stock holding bookshops, more expensive books and fewer published titles....The avoidance of ANY ONE of these consequences would be sufficient for the continuation of the agreement.”

Alongside this paternal concern with the cultural welfare of the community on behalf of legislators, within the trade the protection of books from competition served to insulate the ‘gentlemanly’ nature of book trade work. It also preserved the viability of work in the trade for those rich in cultural capital by ensuring some measure of material reward that was deemed suitable for men and women of learning. Before the implementation of the agreement, competition between publishers squeezed the profitability of books to the extent that,

“Men of ability who would otherwise have followed the family tradition and a love of literature by becoming booksellers were diverted to other types of business.” (Joy 1952:93)

However, the agreement ensured that the right ‘type of person’ could afford to be engaged in this kind work – namely,

“the well educated men and women who with their staff are trying to serve the community well and make bookshops a centre of literary and artistic interest and enlightenment.” (Joy 1952: 95)

Critics of the NBA were similarly informed by discourses surrounding cultural and economic capital. Far from preserving the profitability of the book trade, the NBA was considered to unnaturally support inefficient and poorly organised publishers and booksellers to the detriment of the consumer. As well as conflicting with the economic logic of symbolic production this was also represented as an elitist practice that preserved established cultural norms. Rather than being allowed a role in shaping the demand of customers, the book trade, it was argued, should more readily respond to the demands of consumers through the operations of the market place. According to Terry Maher, former head of Dillon’s and a key figure in the demise of the NBA, under conditions of protection the retail book market was,

“Fragmented, under-capitalised, old-fashioned, inward looking, regulated and, not surprisingly inefficient.” (Maher 1994: 55)

Aside from the unexamined assumptions this statement betrays about the value of market forces in solving these problems, it also connects explicitly with the debates outlined above about the position of the literary field of production within the broader field of economic production. The values of the book trade may appear to be of a different order to that of the market place. Bourdieu points out, however, that whatever the degree of apparent independence of a particular field, “it continues to be affected by the laws of the field, which encompass it, those of economic and political profit.” (Bourdieu 1993: 38) In the ideological climate of the eighties and nineties, in which any legislation that appeared to limit the operation of market forces was considered contrary to the public good, the NBA perished. Its abolition in 1995 was cited by respondents to be the single biggest change affecting the

book industry, and whilst bookselling chains and technological means of stock control had both begun to influence the trade before, the end of the NBA worked to speed up both these processes. The impact of this change was articulated, by those respondents who experienced it, as necessarily changing orientations and priorities in the workplace towards economic imperatives. One described how,

“when I started the word profit was a word that was not used on the shop floor – we were there to sell books. Up at the top, the gods worried about profit and we would hear about it if things were not good.”²⁰

Following the end of the NBA, knowledge about the technical and financial aspects of the trade were necessarily communicated throughout the retail trade at a much broader level, to the extent that one respondent reported that,

“there wouldn’t be a bookseller who joined now that wouldn’t be aware of margin and budgets.”²¹

This apparent shift towards the economic logic in the role of the bookshop worker makes the concept of intellectual engagement with the role and, crucially, the products, as a compensation for the lack of material reward problematic. Knowledge of books, as a resource for constructing the working self, is based upon the mutual recognition of value of books as objects, measured in cultural capital. The more technical knowledge required of bookshop workers about aspects of book production that extend beyond the creation of a work (such as knowledge of publisher’s discounts and margin) complicates this and places an additional, potentially competing, pressure on the worker’s role in relation to the customer.

²⁰ Interview 22/1/02. This respondent had over thirty years’ experience in various positions within the retail book trade.

²¹ Interview 18/1/01. This respondent had eight years’ experience in two chain retailers.

One perception of the worker's role, expressed by respondents above, was that work in this industry allowed for the expression of expertise and the effective use of skills of recognition of value gained, in part through the experience of education. Whilst bookshop workers have never been able to effectively read and discern between all the books in a shop, the perception from customers that they are knowledgeable and genuinely enthusiastic was experienced as a positive aspect of the role. The ability to express this enthusiasm is potentially compromised in a commercial environment, with or without price maintenance legislation, given the competing logics of the trade in symbolic goods. Is the worker's role to express genuine enthusiasm for books if these are out of step with popular taste, difficult to obtain or commercially less rewarding?

The end of price maintenance was perceived as placing an increased emphasis on knowledge of the technical and financial aspects of interaction with the customer. The image of the bookshop worker as a disinterested guide through both the economic market place and the cultural market place of ideas has always been problematic, obscuring the complex processes of production and selection. The emphasis on technical knowledge and the privileging of relationships between publishers and bookshops and bookshop workers and customers, which are based upon price and profitability, makes this image more difficult to maintain. This has a specific impact on choices of stock to order in. The ability to control and develop a particular section of a shop was cited by bookshop workers as a major difference of their work from what they perceived as lower status types of retail. It was also cited by managers as a means by which firms could make use of the education and skills of their work force. Miller (1999) describes how, historically, these choices have been informed by changing discourses of the role of the bookshop. Under conditions of price maintenance, the bookshop may have been constructed as a place to spread 'enlightenment' and learning that reflected the gentlemanly aspects of book production and strong

constructions of the myth of the artist and author as 'shaping' and improving public taste. In the contemporary context, though, the bookshop could equally be constructed as a place designed to facilitate the freedom of choice to a construction of a knowledgeable and sovereign consumer. Both these discourses obscure the processes of selection based upon technical data about potential profitability and the ways in which consumer choice is socially and structurally shaped. Selections of stock based upon attempts to shape the tastes of the consumer may have been based in part at least upon a desire to promote reading and its symbolic resonance.

Selections based upon technical knowledge are more difficult to explain in this way as the role of the worker shifts from intellectual engagement with a product, over which they express some disinterested, creative control that reflects their 'genuine' selves, to a more interested assessment of sales history, stock-turn and margin. The use of technology to assist in these processes was cited by respondents as being of particular importance in explaining the changes in the role of the bookshop and bookshop worker. Electronic point of sale (EPOS) systems of stock management and electronic ordering were both cited as a considerable help in managing the vast numbers of titles published every year. One experienced manager recalled that,

"When I first started I was writing everything on cards – technology's been great because it frees people up...you don't have to spend as much time filing."²²

At the same time though, there was ambivalence over whether or not these developments had diminished the role of the bookshop worker as expert and whether or not bookshop workers were able to engage as creatively with processes of buying. One respondent, of considerable experience within the trade lamented the tendency of contemporary bookshop workers to 'go to the

²² Interview 3/5/01. This respondent was manager of a large town centre branch of a chain retailer. He had twenty years' experience in the retail book trade.

computer' when dealing with enquiries rather than to the shelf of their section. This was deemed to reflect a lack of knowledge, which the computer system effectively made up for. As well as being a discursive echo of romantic rejections of the machine as a barrier to 'genuine' human creativity, this also points to the possibility of a 'de-skilling' aspect of the use of technology.

As has been suggested, in chain bookshops, sections are allocated to workers, even of comparatively little experience, to control. Whilst the sections are clearly limited, there does seem to be an attempt to match these to the interests of the worker. One worker described how in the shop she worked,

"you get something you like, something you don't like and one or two things you have no strong feelings about."²³

The management of these different sections, regardless of 'interest' or preference relied on similar techniques. The EPOS computer is used to produce sales reports from the previous day, produced for each section of the shop. This report would contain a list of the titles in that section sold, an account of sales history (based upon sales on previous days and weeks) the number of that title that remained in stock and whether or not that title was on order. Based upon this information the worker could assess the likelihood of the book being needed or sold again and thus make a decision about whether or not to re-order the book. The worker would enter his or her decisions onto the EPOS computer, the orders would be collated and reviewed by a senior worker or manager and then electronically broadcast to a central ordering system. The ability of workers to act creatively in these kinds of instances is therefore limited to the technical reading of figures and operation of technology, rather than expertise gained through the accumulation of cultural capital. One worker described an incident early in her relatively short

²³ Interview 18/4/01. This respondent was a Library studies graduate with five years' experience in a city centre branch of a chain retailer.

bookshop work career where an attempt to creatively use the system was 'managed'.

"This guy had come in and ordered a book – a history book and history is one of my sections. He wanted to order it and it sounded interesting and I thought – and this was the first time I've done this without asking anybody – I'll order one for him and put one on order for stock. Just one book at 15.99. In about ten minutes I was out in the back and the manager said 'why is this on order? You should have got more details.' It was demoralising."²⁴

This incident demonstrates some interesting tensions evident in the employment relationship of the bookshop. The worker's dismay at this incident illustrates the importance of the image of autonomy to occupational identity and the extent to which this is compromised by the use of technology. The worker's attempt to order the book was based on an interaction with a customer and on ownership of the section for which it was intended. The managerial decision to veto this was based on the viability of the 'risk' of ordering in a book for which no previous sales data was available on the system. Whilst the book shop worker attempts to deal in the market place of ideas as part of the performance of his or her role, the managerial imperative is more readily to the economic market place as it is represented through the stock-control system. The fact that this veto took place 'in the back', in what Goffman (1990) would term an 'off-stage' area is also interesting. The appearance of bookshop workers to be autonomous, knowledgeable experts can be interpreted as commercially useful in a competitive retail environment. The perception that 'people expect more' from bookshop workers than from other types of retail worker justifies this. Equally bookshop workers view of themselves as autonomous is cited as a major element of their distinctiveness from other less 'high status' forms of retail work. The distinctiveness reflects

²⁴ Interview 16/11/00. A Fine-Art graduate and qualified teacher who had been working in a city centre branch of a chain retailer for one year.

their perception of themselves as relatively rich in cultural capital and expert in the relationship with customers. Reliance on computer technology can be seen to rationalise the input of bookshop workers whilst preserving the perception of autonomy that is useful for both firms and workers.

The rise of technology as a sign used by workers to articulate change in the book trade and in book shop work can be interpreted as a reflection of the ambivalence to modernity outlined in Chapter Two as typical of a self influenced by notions drawn from romanticism. This of course obscures the ways in which, in the contemporary trade the book is itself a product of technological advances in printing and design. Instead the book is seen as a sign of separation from the world of technology, which in turn reflects its 'difference' as a commodity. This was heard in talk with respondents in the light of another technological threat to the retail book trade, the rise of Internet book selling. In this context the retail bookshop was considered superior because it allowed a more apparently authentic interaction both between the customer and the book shop worker and between the customer, the worker and the books themselves. This reflected the ability of worker's to guide customers through the communication of 'genuine, face-to-face enthusiasm' and the unique qualities of books as commodities which one manager articulated, thus,

"It [internet bookselling] is not ever going to swamp the bookselling experience because...books are not something you'd want to buy off a computer screen – you want to touch them and feel them."²⁵

This apparent need for physical interaction with books as part of the process of buying and selling evokes Benjamin's concept of the aura of objects being manifest in their particular location in time and space, both of which are apparently compromised by the virtual world of the internet. What is also compromised though is the human element of interaction in bookshop work

²⁵ Interview 18/4/01. English and European Studies graduate. Five years' experience in a town-centre branch of a chain retailer

between agents (customers and workers) with similar orientations towards the products being sold and mutual recognition of the value of the objects in terms of cultural capital. This human aspect of the experience of bookshop work is also compromised by the rise of the chain bookseller, through rationalisation of the processes of ordering and promotion of stock.

Before the rise of chain booksellers and the increased use of technology, stock tended to be ordered solely through publisher's representatives who visited individual shops and negotiated local terms on a shop-by-shop basis. This produced particular relationships between bookshops and publishers that were based upon face-to-face interaction and knowledge of local market conditions and interests. Thomas Joy suggests that, whilst negotiations were inevitably informed by the economic logic in the market for symbolic goods, they were also characterised by elements of mutual recognition and even trust, to the extent that,

“Some of them are so trustworthy that you could with confidence give them your order book and allow them to fill in the titles and numbers of copies, as over the years they get to know the individual requirements of each shop on which they call.” (Joy 1971:82)

These kind of relationships are inevitably altered by the rise of chains with centralised head offices and the ability to negotiate on a national scale over issues such as discount and price. Whilst representatives still visit individual shops, particularly from smaller publishers or to promote new titles, these visits are characterised more as a purely economic negotiation, which requires the technical knowledge of margin and stock budget as well as knowledge of local market conditions. The moves towards replacing representatives with centralised scale-outs of stock (i.e. distributing books from central suppliers based upon calculations relating to size of shop and previous sales histories) and with electronically determined ordering procedures were changes experienced as a threat to the distinctiveness of

the trade. The end of trustworthy relationships with publishers in the determination of margins and discounts reduces the ability of the book trade as a whole to think of itself as a type of community with shared interests in the general promotion of books. Competing economic interests compromise the social aspects of relationships with other sectors of the trade. One book trade worker experiences this change as a loss of an apparently inherent characteristic of the trade that, again, makes it the same as trade in other products. Thus,

“buying without the representative would be akin to shopping at Argos and few booksellers would relish the loss of human contact.” (Manderson 2000).

The continued role of representatives and the local autonomy of shops in centralised corporate systems was a particularly contested site in respondent discourse about changes in the trade. Attitudes towards this issue were not uniform across the chains from which respondents were drawn or consistent amongst respondents within particular chains. At the corporate level the economic logic might privilege rationally organised, central ordering and distribution of stock as a means of securing economies of scale. At the shop level though, autonomy and an appreciation of local conditions acquired through knowledge of the tastes and preferences of local customers was also considered important. Thus one manager commented,

“if everything was dictated by head-office this shop would not be successful.”²⁶

The rise of chains and centralised means of distributing stock can be seen as a threat to local autonomy of shop managers and, through the proliferation of EPOS systems of stock control, challenge the autonomy of shop workers. Autonomy remains, however, a key rhetorical device for bookshop workers in their understanding of their role and its distinctiveness from other types of

²⁶ Interview 12/4/01. Manager of a city centre branch, twenty years' trade experience.

retail work. These tensions will be explored in the following chapter which will more closely examine the employment relationship within the retail book shop and suggest ways in which book shop workers negotiate their identities in an increasingly centrally organised and corporate workplace.

The rise of the chains, increased uses of technology and the increased competition based upon price have clearly altered the landscape of the U.K retail book trade in the last twenty years. What this chapter has attempted to illustrate is that these changes perpetuate the central tension in the market place for symbolic goods, between books as commodities to be bought and sold and books as distinct markers of cultural capital. The narrative of change in the culture industries (identified by Lash and Urry 1994), in which the rise of commercialism has reduced an apparent essence, can be identified in relation to book shop workers and other trade figures representations of change. This narrative is however simply one representation of this change, rather than an accurate construction of a complex and contested process. Bourdieu's notion of the autonomy of the literary field from the broader economic field in which it is located helps to illustrate the on-going process of negotiation between perpetual and competing logics in the production of cultural artefacts. The recurring discourse of the bookshop having to change to 'survive' is based upon this negotiation. Rather than an essence being diminished by change, talk from book shop workers suggests that some sense of aura based upon a particular orientation to books survives these changes and is used by workers in the construction of their working identities as distinct from, or even in opposition to, the broader economic field. We can conclude from this that processes of rationalisation in the book trade, such as the rise of the chain book shop, the end of price maintenance and the rise of the use of technology do not simplistically reduce the cultural authority of the trade. Whilst this may be a compelling narrative of change for those working in the industry, in fact these processes merely emphasise and accentuate the clash between cognitive or rational and aesthetic concerns. The following,

concluding, chapter will relate this view of the bookshop working self to the broader theoretical narrative of the contemporary working self that this thesis is attempting to examine.

Chapter 7 The romantic triumph of bookshop work

The aim of this chapter is to re-visit some of the concepts of the self, introduced in Chapters One and Two, and integrate them into the specific employment setting of the bookshop. In particular, it examines the extent to which the bookshop fits the model of the self as diminished or colonised, as proposed by some contemporary critics of the workplace. It will also point to the contrasting and competing pressures on the bookshop working self, from both managerial sources and from more ephemeral and historically constituted ideas of worthwhile work, that resonate with particular orientations to cultural capital articulated through an appreciation of books as a special kind of commodity. As Chapter Two suggested, accounts of contemporary society emphasise the importance of consumption and consumerism to understanding how society is organised and how the contemporary self is shaped. Authors such as Giddens (1991) or Bauman (1987, 1997) stress the centrality of consumption and consumerism in allowing contemporary agents a contested freedom to shape their own 'life-styles' or manage their own biographies through the manipulation of symbolic consumer goods. The stabilities and restrictions that are presumed to have stemmed from the production oriented past have been diminished and contemporary agents understand themselves, not purely through their experience of work, but also through the experience of consumption. This process is based upon an accompanying discourse of individualisation but at the same time authors such as Bourdieu (1984) implicate consumption in the formation of group identities, notably through the acquisition of cultural and symbolic forms of capital.

Workers, in a society organised around consumption, are ambivalent figures characterised by a 'lack'. If we become who we are through our experiences as consumers, our experience as workers is, almost by definition, diminished time away from our true calling. According to Bauman, if work was, following

Weber, the ethical driving force of modern society, then consumption is its late modern equivalent. Contemporary techniques of work organisation and management can, perhaps, be interpreted as reflecting this in two ways, which this chapter will explore. Firstly, the focus upon subjectivity in the management of contemporary workplaces that resonates with the construction of the worker as an autonomous, individual, *consuming* self. Secondly, the notion of work being itself appreciated for its aesthetic qualities and for its role in developing the self, understood as one made through experience. The bookshop, this chapter argues, can be understood as a space in which some of the contemporary assumptions about the contemporary workplace (the contemporary service workplace in particular) and the selves that it produces can be seen to be problematic. Firstly, though, the bookshop will be examined in the context of some contemporary and historical sociological accounts of the retail workplace.

Theorising the shop

As Chapters Four, Five and Six have demonstrated the key to understanding the book trade lies in an appreciation of the ways in which it has been historically constructed, and has historically constructed itself, as *different*. In Chapter Four this was demonstrated through reference to representation of writing, books and bookshops in literature and popular narratives, which stressed the separation of the processes of production of books and literature and selling of books from the ordinary processes of commodity exchange. In Chapter Five these differences were built on with reference to the particular meanings associated with the consumption of books, both for the audience and for the industry. In Chapter Six the ways in which this understanding of difference feeds into the construction of the book trade as a sphere of production and particular role of the bookshop worker were explored. Alongside this difference, though, and of equal interest to this project, there are interesting ways in which the experience of bookshop work and the

employment relationship within book selling firms can be understood as the same as in other types of retail and other types of workplace. Whilst the difference is a source of prestige, the sameness is a source of tension.

In a society apparently organised around consumption the space of the shop takes upon a particular symbolic resonance. Critics of contemporary consumer society have, tellingly, labelled contemporary shops, particularly those located in the massive out of town shopping centres and malls, as 'cathedrals' of consumption. This is a metaphor which, not only, evokes the scale of shopping and its centrality to the experience of contemporary society but also emphasises its ethical dimension and its role in shaping the selves and in winning the souls of contemporary subjects. In this kind of construction of shopping, workers in shops take on an important, pivotal role. Their work provides the means through which everyone else can do the important expressive and symbolic identity work of consumer society. Whilst historically the shop might, for the majority of people at least, have been a space for rather mundane and unexciting economic activity centred upon the satisfaction of material needs, the late modern shop is by contrast a vibrant and exciting place to be and shopping itself has become a leisure activity. An effect of this has been to alter the skills and abilities required in retail environments, which has produced some interesting tensions within the employment relationship.

Interactivity in service work, and retail work in particular, makes for difficulties in managing workers in these environments as labour power of workers in this sector is embodied and output and productivity are not simply measurable. At the same time, the skills of retail are not easily taught. Whilst technical and procedural aspects of the process (such as management of stock levels, appreciation of computerised systems, the ability to work a till etc.) can be practised and learnt in a classroom setting, the actual ability to deal with, and sell to, customers is by definition only gained through experience. This gives

interactive service labour what Fuller and Smith (1991) describe as a distinctive element in the context of debates over the labour process, following such theorists as Braverman (1974). If the trend in managing the labour process is to de-skill work through the separation of labour power from the individual worker, in retail they suggest “the most profitable resolution of the dilemma obligates that employers expand, to a greater or lesser degree, workers’ control over their own labour.” (Fuller and Smith 1991: 4) Success in retailing might still be measured in terms of profit and cost but, du Gay argues, in the late modern context (particularly following what he terms the retail revolution of the nineteen eighties in the U.K), “retailing is increasingly a *hybrid* activity; which is to say what is properly ‘economic’ and what is properly ‘cultural’ about retailing are inseparable.” (du Gay 1996:117) The ‘cultural’ aspects of retail work are of particular importance to this thesis and the differing meanings ascribed to this word become a source for particular tensions in the employment relationship of the bookshop. In the context of debates over the labour process, though, it is important to bear in mind that if retail is about the generation of meaning then workers in retail environments are, along with such elements as the design of the shop, pivotal generators of this meaning and therefore crucial to the success of the commercial operation.

In her historical examination of the experience of work in the emerging department store of early twentieth century America, Susan Porter Benson (1988) points out that the difficulty in quantifying success in retail in terms of productive output led to a difficulty in implementing managerial initiatives drawn from other sectors of the economy, particularly Taylorism. Whilst one might rationally assume that high sales represented a good workforce performance, the measurement of sales on a day-to-day basis was an untrustworthy indicator as,

“if an item was not sold *properly*, with due consideration for the customer’s sensibilities, the store stood to suffer in the short run through the return of the merchandise and in the long run through the loss of the customer’s goodwill.” (Porter Benson 1988: 127)

Attempts to rationalise the procedures of salesmanship (or, for Porter Benson’s study *saleswomanship*) were resisted by workers and generated resentment within employment relationships that ultimately affected morale and therefore productivity. The tension that this illustrates is a crucial one in managing the service or retail workplace. Whilst retail is increasingly the province of large organisations with strategic aims and objectives, these are necessarily premised upon the potentially idiosyncratic interactions between sales staff and customers. Porter Benson recounts the frustration that this generated within organisations. Managers were able to devise schemes to improve productivity and efficiency but their effectiveness was placed in the untrustworthy hands of salespeople. She describes how,

“managers might frame stern policies to cut the costs of customer service but if salespeople informed customers of these rules in a tactless way, they might turn out to be false economies. Managers might streamline their stock and choose assortments cannily, but merchandise would sell only if sales people presented it convincingly to customers.” (Porter Benson 1988:125)

In the more recent history of the U.K retail sector similar tensions are evident. The rise of the self-service shop can be seen as a process of de-skilling of the seller. Indeed in a society so apparently enamoured with consumerism the notion of a salesman seems itself something of an anachronism. The construction of the autonomous, enlightened, self-actualising consumer that informs both celebratory and critical accounts of the contemporary, reflexive self seems to reduce a need for a process of *selling* with its discursive association with a process of manipulation. In its place, the consumer does the work of the salesperson his/herself and the role of the shop and its

suppliers are merely to provide the means for the satisfaction of personally derived dreams and desires.

The continued presence of a sales *assistant*, even if this role has been diminished and de-skilled, inevitably keeps a human (and therefore an unpredictable) element in the service encounter. The crucial moment in retail, the sale, is still in the hands of retail workers rather than corporate or organisational strategists. The autonomy and discretion that workers are able to exercise, for all its inevitably 'irrational character' (due to the humanity of both the sales assistant and the individual customer), is paradoxically pivotal to the achievement of organisational goals and requires considerable 'institutional trust' between managers and workers. If the worker is going to be free in the context of the day-to-day performance of their role to exercise discretion and take decisions, then relationships with management and knowledge of organisational imperatives become crucial. As Fox points out,

"The greater the extent to which the occupant of a high-discretion role entertains values, interests and goals which diverge from theirs, the greater the threat he may use his discretion in ways of which they would disapprove if they became aware of them...It is crucial for his superiors therefore to ensure that, as far as possible his values, interests and goals are integrated with theirs." (Fox 1974:58)

The burden of management in the retail context falls upon fostering and encouraging in the workers particular orientations to the customer. In the more contemporary retail environment this has resulted in a shift to what du Gay has described as 'the culture of the customer' in managing retail workplaces and a more general identifiable concern with the 'culture' of the workplace in organising and managing tensions in the employment relationship. This has resulted in what Fuller and Smith (1991) describe as 'management by customer'. These processes have gone hand in hand with the 'retail revolution' in the U.K. The rise of the modern retail phenomena in

the eighties and nineties was, initially at least, based upon a construction of success as measurable in scientific terms, according to sales per customer, associated with a conception of retail as a *science*, which could be quantified and planned, as opposed to an *art* in which the values of service co-existed with the values of commerce. The winning of the trust and compliance of *customers* was far more important to developing retail conglomerates than the trust and compliance of workers. This resulted in high levels of staff turnover and low levels of motivation and commitment amongst retail staff. However du Gay suggests by the mid-nineties in the U.K, when the concerns of retail organisations turned to questions of market-share, labour effectiveness came to be recognised as of increasing importance. The focus here is on the *quality* of the service interaction, with differences in this quality being seen as the key element of advantage in the highly competitive world of contemporary retail. Sturdy (1998) describes the procedures undertaken in order to ensure orientation to the customer through promotion of such managerial concepts of Total Quality Management.

“Research is used to identify and monitor customers’ service needs and attitudes including complaints. This along with periodic employee attitude surveys and regulatory controls, provides a basis for setting service standards and/or related customer guarantees, developing training programmes and evaluating the progress of the customer service initiative. Service standards and objectives relate to response times, product knowledge and, in particular, employees’ behaviour or orientation...These objectives may be communicated in a number of ways including training. This is provided to both management and staff through events, workshops and so on, imparting both service ethos and techniques and product knowledge. The connection is made between the company’s competitive success or survival, customer service and the role/importance of the employee.” (Sturdy 1998: 30)

These kinds of initiatives also allow for the interests of the customer to be evoked as a justification for rationalisation within the workplace. The disciplinary element of these managerial tactics has led to a focus upon

‘emotional labour’ in sociological study of interactive service environments. In the creation of the shop as a meaningful site, and for that meaning to be one of pleasure in the context of a leisure activity, rather than simply one of mundane day-to-day satisfaction of needs, the shop is transformed into a theatre (Fitch and Woudhysen 1987) and the workers in the shop are transformed into actors playing the roles of the attentive, cheerful and helpful sales assistant. Alan Bryman’s work on Disney themes parks places a particular emphasis on emotional labour in the performance of the service role in these environments. He suggests that workers’ demeanours and language are ‘designed’, through the emphases of training, to convey the impression that they, like the customer, are also engaged in the fun of consumption. A crucial element of this emotional labour is “to convey a sense that the employee is not engaged in work, so that the consumer is not reminded of the world of work and can get on with the happy task of buying, eating, gambling and so on.” (Bryman 1999:43) Studies of emotional labour (Hochschild 1983, Sosteric 1996) stress its potentially detrimental affects on the possibility of producing coherent work identities as a limit to the possibility of ‘true expression’ in the workplace. It can arguably be represented as the very rationalisation of human feeling itself to the aims and objectives of commercial operations. It is not enough in contemporary retail environments that our retail assistants smile. As Sturdy (1998) points out, it is becoming increasingly important as part of the battle for the imagination of the customer that they *mean it* as well. Erickson (1995) and Erickson and Wharton (1997) suggest the type of self generated in this environment is *inauthentic*. Workers may choose to resist these impositions through surface acting and distancing but ultimately an emotional conformity to the goals of the workplace becomes a requirement of the service role.

The creation of this figure of the retail assistant depends upon managerial emphasis on the culture of the workplace. This is manifest in the retail industry in promotion of a managed and responsible autonomy amongst retail

workers. The values of these workers are assumed to fit with those of the organisation in which they work and, crucially, with those of the customers whom they serve. Du Gay labels this as a shift towards the generation of an 'enterprise' culture in which the retail worker is co-opted into the process of shaping the imagination of the customer (of allowing the customer to express his or her *self*) as part of a process of self-expression of the worker. Both are assumed, in the discourse of enterprise, to be on the same journey of self-discovery and self-fulfilment. Working with an image of a self-actualising consumer whose imagination needs to be won through the interaction of the service encounter, the focus of 'enterprise culture' is to recruit the worker, themselves imagined as concerned with self-fulfilment, to this process. In du Gay's study this resulted in a curiously critical and romantic view of the retail worker as what might be characterised as (following Sartre and the representations outlined in chapter four) 'grocers who dream' whose concerns are not with the rational or even material reward but more noble. Du Gay quotes an internal document from one of the companies he studied describing worker's attitudes in a poetical manner,

"For them their work is about a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor. The state has defined power as the power inherent in things – in tax revenue, in barrels of oil, in miles of road. These young people define power as the power inherent in dreams, in songs, in reach for the human spirit." (quoted in du Gay 1996: 134)

This kind of romantic evocation of retail work might not be generalisable to all retail (though it certainly is, as the ideas of difference and worthwhile work demonstrate, to the book trade). However, the implication of this construction of the drive for meaning and the location of this meaning, within the processes of retail, resonates with broader values of consumer society. If shopping is also about a search for meaning then the retail worker in the cathedrals of consumption become more like clerics than clerks. In the

historical construction of the role of the shop worker Porter Benson describes how workers were caught in a complex 'triangle' of orientations to the customer, to the management and to their colleagues all of whom required different, occasionally conflicting values. In enterprise culture, rhetorically at least these distinctions are no longer meaningful. Instead,

“within the discourse of enterprise there is no longer room for any contradiction or conflict between the motives and desires of the employee as an individual and the goals and objectives of the organisation for which he or she works. The individual human being at work, as much as outside of it, is considered to be engaged in a project to shape his or her life as an autonomous individual driven by motives of self-fulfilment.” (du Gay 1996: 139)

This construction of the 'culture' of the retail workplace is a particularly useful one for this thesis as it draws together debates about the relationship between production (i.e. work) and consumption as resources for the late modern self. It also privileges a historically derived construction of the self that is defined as a thing that individual agents own and are obligated to maximise. In the context of debates about the self at work the retail worker in 'enterprise culture' can be seen to be analogous to the 'colonised' or 'engineered' worker described by post-structuralist writers on the corporate workplace, such as Casey and Ezzy. In particular the construction of workers and customers as on a shared journey of discovery and self-fulfilment resonates with critical accounts of contemporary work as concerned with perpetuating the relationships of consumer society. Ezzy's accounts of the engineered culture of the contemporary workplace suggests that

“workplaces with engineered cultures are an institutional site for the production of a culture of self-gratificatory, narcissistic individualism consistent with more general consumer relations.” (Ezzy 2001:631)

On the surface, du Gay's schema fits with this model and implies retail workers, through the rise of enterprise culture and its accompanying emphasis on emotional labour in the satisfaction of the needs of the customer, are easily allied with the goals of the organisations employing them. However, du Gay also emphasises that the creation of a culture of the workplace is not simply a 'top down' imposition of values but a contested process. He suggests that,

"though enterprise prefers a *tabula rasa* upon which to write its compositions, it actually seeks to produce its effects under circumstances not of its own choosing. It must make its mark through an engagement with already existing cultural relations and hence inscribe itself, for example, upon persons with particular biographies and upon organisations with specific histories." (du Gay 1996: 150)

In the context of the bookshop and the broader book trade, these existing cultural relations, drawn from the orientation to the *product* rather than to the customer or the organisation, produce particular tensions which become difficult to break down but form the basis for the negotiation and articulation of the bookshop worker's role. As Chapter One discussed, managerial attempts to 'invent' and control a culture of the workplace are based upon a particular structural functionalist notion of culture which marginalise other potential orientations or values drawn from sources outside the workplace. A fuller account of 'culture' at work needs to take into account values derived from non-managerial or organisational sources. The focus on the subjectivity of workers, in the types of enterprise cultures that du Gay suggests are typical of contemporary retail, can be interpreted as a reaction to the high discretion of retail workers that requires the winning of 'souls' to organisational goals, through the rhetoric of self-fulfilment. In any workplace, this imposition of culture and idealisation of a working self can never be complete. The low pay that typifies the retail sector means that notions of trust and teamwork between workers and managers are always fragile. The flexibility required of

and lack of organisation amongst retail workers means that however much workers conform to the values and goals of the workplace they are still liable to be dismissed. The relationship between managers and workers can therefore be theorised as a 'simulacrum' of trust. (Ezzy 2001)

In the retail book trade these relationships are arguably more fragile still due to powerful alternative narratives of both culture and the self that inform workers in the book industry. The essence of the romantic self explored in Chapter Two was precisely its separation from the emerging materialistic, industrial and rational order of emerging modernity. The romantic self in the book trade, drawing from the powerful narratives of books and literature as sources of the self that stand askance from the excesses of the modern world, mean that the already problematic and inconsistent relationship between individual workers and management cultures is further complicated. Whilst the self of the idealised enterprise culture can accumulate value through satisfactory completion of company goals measurable in sales, alternative sources of value in the book trade, informed by orientations to cultural capital and constructions of books which mask their commodity status, limit the ways in which success can be easily translated into commercial success. The following section will look specifically at the tensions that emerge in the employment relationship in the retail book trade and the ways in which these tensions are managed.

'Nothing Permanent.' Managing romantic, reflexive workers

As du Gay outlines, the development of retail in the U.K. has been characterised by shifting emphases in the expectations upon workers. The rise of chain retailing and the rationalisation and concentration of the processes of supplying goods to consumers led to the rise of 'scientific' approaches of ordering, stocking and displaying goods which affected the possibility of worker engagement with the processes of buying and selling of

stock. The concern in retail organisation was with the attraction of the shop as a place to shop, rather than a place to work. When the workers were thought of at all it was in such terms as maximising sales output per employee, encouraging flexibility and reducing labour costs. More recently, a concern with winning the souls of customers has re-emphasised the importance of worker identification with the goals of organisations resulting in the re-imagining of organisational identities that conflate worker concerns with self-fulfilment with commercial and strategic goals. These management concerns do not extend, though, to notable improvements in pay and conditions but rather emphasise the fulfilling aspects of work in a vibrant, leisure environment.

The retail book trade, particularly as developed through the rise of the high street chains, has largely followed this model but has also maintained a discursive distance from it. Whilst other retailers might have followed the Taylorite model of rational organisations peopled by de-skilled sales assistants, the development of the retail book trade had at its heart an emphasis on the aesthetic possibilities of work in an industry with a symbolic resonance that pre-dated the notion of shopping as leisure. It has also maintained a rhetorical connection to the idea of the knowledgeable, autonomous sales assistant. The possibility of fulfilment in book retail did not have to be imposed through managerial discourse of enterprise culture. It already existed through the historical narratives of the symbolic importance of books. This aesthetic element to the possibility of bookshop work allowed the construction of retail work as short term, 'flexible' and even low-paid to be constructed as a strength in this sector. Tim Waterstone, founder of the largest U.K retailer recalls his strategy, specifically aimed at recruiting 'bright, young graduates', as emphasising the aesthetic aspects and also the short term.

“I’d say to them, ‘just come for a few years, have a terrific time, and then make way for someone else.’” (quoted in *The Bookseller* 19/11/99)

This type of construction, of retail work as pleasurable experience, is allowed through an established mutual recognition of the symbolic importance of the product being sold and the accumulation of cultural capital that association with such products enables. In the development of chain booksellers, this enthusiasm enabled early recruits to the industry to play an important and recognisable part in the growth of businesses in contrast to the de-skilled flexible worker typical of the ‘retail science’ driven retail outlets. As a result, according to an editorial in the trade magazine, *The Bookseller*,

“The chains made bookselling look an attractive job for bookish young people. True, the salaries were low; but the role offered independence, a congenial environment and employers that were confident and ambitious.” (*The Bookseller* 5/4/02)

Whilst de-skilled retail work became the very epitome of the flexible, ‘dead-end’ ‘McJob’, bookshop work was able to attract motivated employees, many of whom were graduates, by virtue of its association with cultural capital. It offered a pleasurable, if temporary, transition from the world of education to the world of work. In the terms of enterprise culture it can also be seen to have offered the post-Fordist Holy Grail of engaged and inspired but reflexive and flexible workers. The irony is that, whilst other retail sectors are increasingly stressing the need for this kind of emotional and aesthetic engagement with retail work, chain booksellers are experiencing what has been described as a crisis in recruitment because of low pay and particular competition amongst graduate employers. (Stone 1999, Kean 2002)

Workers, managers and directors interviewed for this study recognised the particular tensions in the employment relationship. On the positive side there was the aesthetic experience of bookshop work and the level of autonomy that bookshop workers maintained (perceived in comparison to other retail

sectors). In contrast workers also experienced dissatisfaction with the low pay typical of the retail sector and failed to acknowledge the possibility of bookshop work as a long-term career goal. There are a number of interesting issues that emerge from these tensions. Firstly, an interesting finding from talk with bookshop workers and managers was the *lack* of a conscious, active, decision to enter the trade for aesthetic or other reasons. Whilst the notion of 'career' has been theoretically critiqued as a means of management control and self-organisation in understanding the reflexive self (Rose 1999, Grey 1994), the workers and managers I spoke to rarely referred to their decision to enter the retail book trade as one that stemmed from personal motivation, ambition or a coherent sense of biography. In fact every single respondent claimed to have 'drifted into it', and if there was instrumentality in their experience it was more in terms of satisfying immediate material needs. One respondent described how,

"I was quite skint so I was basically taking anything to try and get down my student loans and trying to clear my debts. Mainly temping jobs at agencies, menial stuff. I was temping on and off for about two years doing whatever I could find really but it was right down to – well I say down to – it did include production line work. To be honest I didn't have many career aspirations which is why I kind of fell from one thing to another. But I'm quite happy where I am here."¹

Another similar experience is described thus,

"I went to university, got a degree then I pottered around for six-months until I started working in a bookshop. Just temping work, things like working in bars and cafés that sort of thing – nothing I'd call proper work."²

Such accounts can in one sense be interpreted as evidence of a lack of clear, personally derived sense of biography. Such workers might also be

¹ Interview 17/4/01. This respondent was an English graduate who had worked in the same town centre branch of a chain retailer for four and a half years.

² Interview 11/6/01. This respondent had nine years' experience in a chain retailer, including one year's managerial experience.

considered the very epitome of the kind of worker required by contemporary post-Fordist capitalist relations, lacking a clear sense of place or direction but happy to 'browse' the potential experiences of work on offer before finding an occupation that 'fits'. In another sense, though, these kinds of account also imply a resentment of the need to work. In the former, work is a necessity to re-pay debts and the material reward initially outweighs the aesthetic criteria. Ultimately, though there are aesthetic judgements in place. The confession of being reduced to production line work implies a hierarchy in the consideration of types of work. For the second respondent the construction of work in the bookshop as 'proper work' is in contrast to the presumably improper work of other face-to-face service environments.

There was a perception amongst respondent of the typicality of their experience, not just within the retail book trade but within the broader experience of the labour market, with an acceptance of a lack of permanence and stability. One manager described how,

"People drift a lot. In the past we've lost three or four people a year because people have drifted in and they didn't know what they wanted to do. There are a few core people who want a career but a few just see it as a stopgap – a nice job to have in the interim. A lot of graduates would see bookselling as an intellectual career but nothing permanent so a lot of people wouldn't necessarily leave because they disliked it – just because they didn't see it as anything permanent."³

The idea of a core of workers attracted to the trade as a career surrounded by peripheral workers willing to engage in short-term but intellectual work was a recurring one. The perception of the majority of bookshop workers was that work in this sector was, for most people in the trade, not a permanent conscious effort to shape a career. This was explained both in terms of the

³ Interview 11/4/01. This respondent was an English and European studies graduate with 4 years experience.

typicality of impermanence as the contemporary experience of the labour market but also because of the limited possibilities for sustaining a personal biography due to the lack of material reward. Wages in bookshop work were a recurring source of dissatisfaction, though this was tempered by an appreciation of the pleasure involved in the work. One experienced bookshop worker, with experience as a manager of a large London shop described the necessity of explaining the realities of work in this sector to new recruits,

“I’ve always thought it was my responsibility to point out to any potential recruit to sit down and realistically work out if they can live on what they earn. Rent, travel, food and be realistic because many people have started thinking, ‘oh I’ll manage’ and they would come back in tears after three months and say ‘I can’t manage’. I had somebody, really good potential for bookselling and it broke my heart because we couldn’t hang on to them because I couldn’t say ‘oh, I’ll see you in the office – there’s £2000”⁴

The concept of budgeting *for* a particular position, rather than work itself providing a means for the satisfaction of material needs, emphasises the centrality of the pleasurable experience of the work as the driving motivation for it. There was a strong feeling amongst workers and managers that work in the industry provided rewards other than financial but that financial pressures inevitably and disappointingly tempered these rewards. Thus one worker described how

“You pay a sacrifice in that you doing something that you enjoy doing but yeah, the money is poor. And you have to be realistic and you have to get on and you have to live and as much as you like books if you can’t do that then it can’t be done.”⁵

The sense here is that bookshop work, like the creative work described by Bourdieu in the *Rules of Art* is only symbolically autonomous from the broader

⁴ Interview 22/1/02. This respondent had over thirty years experience in the trade and was currently employed as a training consultant.

⁵ Interview 11/4/02. An English and European Studies graduate with four year’s experience.

economic field and that the 'real world' inevitably encroaches upon its pleasures.

This tension is felt particularly keenly because of the high number of graduates engaged in bookselling. As Chapter Six discussed there was a tension between the day-to-day realities of shop work and the perception of the prestige of the work drawn from an appreciation of cultural capital. Whilst graduates were attracted to the work, there was little in the day-to-day experience of shop work that required a university education, other than the appreciation of the value of the books. Even this was contested, though, in the context of debates over the quality of the books being sold and the tensions between the commercial economy and the 'cultural' one. Training provided by a university education enabled workers to enjoy the benefits of cultural capital in their appreciation of the aesthetic pleasures of work with symbolically important things but also, paradoxically, limited the possibility of constructing a stable biography or 'living'. Bookshop workers who were graduates in particular were in an ambivalent position. Their presence in the bookshop allowed them to demonstrate and make use of their accumulated cultural capital but it also reminded them that those rich in cultural capital do not work in shops. One worker described how the day-to-day experiences of shop work reminded her of the ambiguities of this position.

"The other day the till thingy [roll] ran out and we were trying to fix it and I could just feel these people thinking 'Oh my God these idiots', y'know and sometimes you wish you could tell someone, y'know, 'I've got a degree as well and I've done it all', 'cos I could feel everybody looking at us because I would do the same if I was in a shop."⁶

This ambiguous position of being rich in cultural capital, but having this richness obscured by the mundane experiences of shop work, results in what

⁶ Interview 11/1/01. A History of Art graduate who had worked for six months in a city centre branch of a chain retailer.

one assistant manager described as common feelings of resentment amongst staff. This implies the failure of bookshop work to provide the life-style presumed to follow from successful experiences of education,

“It’s a real stereotype but there are lots of people who are desperately unhappy and they’re not quite sure what to do about it. They’re academics who have a high expectation of life that have gone into retail or whatever and stuck with it and not been able to get out of it again and maybe because of the high expectations haven’t found happiness in their personal life either.”⁷

This picture of the ontologically insecure bookshop worker is a compelling one in terms of the broader narrative of this thesis but not one necessarily generaliseable to the respondents, either workers or managers. More typically workers came across as frustrated but broadly content and managers frustrated but sympathetic. A director of a chain made this frustration explicit by inferring the problematic relationship between bookshop workers and their graduate peers,

“For most people it’s a dream and they love doing it. And it must be terribly frustrating to see their peers earning more than our managers are earning in a very short time after leaving university but some people don’t mind that. Some people aren’t very materialistic and we’re quite lucky there are so many people who want to work with books – and from those that want to there are those that can afford to.”⁸

This construction of the ‘values’ of bookshop workers as separate from the material is a particularly interesting one which clearly resonates with du Gay’s notions of enterprise culture focussing on narratives of self-fulfilment in managing retail workers. However in the context of bookshop work this narrative does not stem from managerial attempts to manage or impose

⁷ Interview 15/1/02. This respondent had a post-graduate degree in History and had worked in the retail book trade for three years. She had recently taken up a junior managerial position at a chain retailer situated in a new shopping centre.

⁸ Interview 14/2/01. This respondent was the personnel director of a major retail chain/

cultural values. The self-fulfilment that might compensate for the lack of material reward is not necessarily drawn from the successful meeting of company goals. In the terms of the romantic account of enterprising shop workers drawn from du Gay's study, the 'astonishment' that workers are seeking is not inspired by management. Rather, management benefits from established values of disinterestedness associated with work in the market for symbolic goods.

Interestingly though, despite the frustrations of the role, the experience of bookshop work and the employment relationship within bookselling firms was largely described as positive, particularly in relation to the perceived experiences of other workplaces. The 'sacrifice' that workers paid for work with symbolic goods was also rewarded with a working atmosphere generally judged to be lacking in obvious conflict which again appears to be informed by a mutual recognition of the value of the work in which they were engaged and the value of the products. One worker described an almost deferential gratitude that,

"They allow you to work in a place you love everyday. I mean you find that the people higher up the chain have the same ideas that people down the chain have and that makes a difference because it feels like everyone is in it together and not, y'know, them and us."⁹

Such a worker might easily be constructed as 'colonised' by managerial discourses of teamwork and 'enterprise cultures', in which notions of personal fulfilment are colluded with organisational goals. However, these similarities between 'us' and 'them' were not premised on commercial goals but based upon a construction of personal, social relationships between management and workers. One manager described, though in a tentative way, the

⁹ Interview 10/5/01. This respondent was an Art and English Literature graduate who had worked for the same town centre branch of a chain retailer for four years.

relationship between content workers and content customers that might typify an 'enterprise culture' approach.

"Hopefully it comes across that I'm keen for us to do really well and everybody seems to be as well and when it all works together and you've got a good motivated team that's really nice 'cos everybody's happy and it comes across to the customers and they're happy so it all feeds into each other. It's not some happy love-bug thing but it's kind of nice and I think that ups productivity as well so that's good if you've got a good team. It sounds very cheesy."¹⁰

There is a recognition here of the importance of creating a harmonious relationship between workers as part of the process of successful customer service. There is also, though, a critical distance for this respondent from this as a management tool in itself but more a reflection of the sociality of relationships between workers and management with similar values. The teamwork and motivation in the retail book trade can perhaps be theorised as a bottom up creation rather than a reflection of an imposed managerial culture. It also reflects a common relationship to cultural capital. This is not uncontested, as Chapter Six pointed out. There are tensions between those engaged in the broader processes of book production that mirror the tensions outlined by Bourdieu in the market for symbolic goods though, in the retail book trade, these do not necessarily map onto distinctions between management interest in commercial reward and worker concern with the accumulation of cultural capital. These tensions emerge in the relationship between rational and emotional approaches to bookselling, which will be explored in the following section. In terms of the employment relationship, though, workers and managers were generally presumed to be able to manage and respond to tensions in a largely non-conflictual way. Respondents were asked, for example about procedures that existed for

¹⁰ Interview 18/4/01. This respondent was manager of a small town centre bookshop. She had joined five years previously after completing her English and European Studies degree.

consultation between staff and managers and the possible need for formal organisation and representation amongst bookshop workers.

Despite low levels of pay, the need for this was largely rejected as disputes, when they arose (and the impression was they arose rarely in all the firms that participated in the study), were resolved in terms that were centred on the personal. The question of union membership itself was largely rejected. Issues of union membership have been important in the development of the contemporary U.K retail book industry. Terry Maher, former head of the chain Dillon's describes his struggle with the unionised workforce of the flagship Gower Street London store as central to his success.

"These might sound strong anti- trades union sentiments for a Liberal; the fact is the abdication of responsibility by weak management had been fully exploited by the union and it was the union which ran the shop. This had to change. I found the first staff/union meeting depressing; there was open hostility and every statement I made was questioned in tones of disbelief. This sounded like war and I was the enemy." (Maher 1994: 57)

During the course of this study, the issue of union membership emerged as a prominent issue in the trade and national press in the context of strained employment relationships at the internet retailer Amazon. The time of the study also coincided with an attempt to set up a branch of the Transport and General Worker's Union for London workers in the largest retail chain, Waterstone's. The presence of these two issues allowed me to explore the issue of union membership with respondents as part of the broader inquiry about the employment relationship. None of the respondents were union members and only one had experience of union membership within the booktrade. One respondent commented that his lack of union membership and that of his colleagues could be accounted for in terms of a broader lack of visibility of unions.

“I suspect the majority of people who work here don’t know what union we would be members of were we to be members of one. It’s never really been part of, I’ve never in my working life been part of a union so I wouldn’t really know how to deal with it at all.”¹¹

Other respondents though suggested that this lack of recognition of a need for organisation also stemmed from a lack of recognition of themselves as in any way exploited by their position. This was informed by two inter-linked perceptions. Firstly, that bookshop work was done by people of a certain type, analogous to participants in processes of gentlemanly capitalism who reject the assumed conflict that union membership might imply. One manager explained,

“We don’t attract the militants. We tend to attract gentlefolk. Again that’s probably the perception of the type of people that are attracted to it”¹²

Secondly this difference was posited upon a particular orientation to cultural capital, which enabled workers to engage in reasonable discussion with their managerial superiors in order to resolve disputes. One manager explained,

“I think booksellers are usually literate, usually left-wing and usually capable of talking about things to get them sorted out. Don’t you find that booksellers are incredibly left wing? It’s a hippie occupation – middle-class hippies.”¹³

This is an interesting construction of the employment relationship that explicitly connects workers’ abilities to effectively represent themselves with their accumulation of cultural capital. It also, through the evocation of the notion of the ‘hippie occupation’, located in class terms, discursively separates workers in this industry from the mundane struggles between capital and labour. Whilst again this could be argued as evidence of

¹¹ Interview 17/4/01. This respondent had four and a half years experience in a town centre branch of a chain retailer,

¹² This respondent was manager of a small city centre branch of a chain retailer.

¹³ Interview 11/5/01. A History of Art graduate with eleven years’ trade experience.

‘colonisation’ by organisational goals and values, in this context this is problematic. The historical association with the production of books and literature that bookshop work has, also connects it with discourses of creative work as non-alienated labour. The mutual recognition between managers and workers of the value of work measured in cultural capital, rather than financial reward, allows for this benign, relatively conflict free employment relationship. One respondent also described how this mutual recognition also made discussing issues of low pay problematic, as if it reminded workers engaged in social relationships based upon shared recognition of cultural capital of their position in economic, employment relationships. She described a conversation with a visiting director of the firm in which she was employed.

“He was talking to me for a long time because we went to the same university and he was talking about that and he said ‘is there anything you’d like to make it better for you to work here?’ and I said ‘yeah, paid lunches’. But I think they don’t take you seriously as soon as you say that they think ‘oh she’s out for...all she wants is more money.’”¹⁴

The resolution of conflict or the management of tensions in the employment relationship was, then, focused upon the personal relationships between workers and managers and the creation of a convivial atmosphere, in part based upon mutual recognition of the value of the work and the type of people suited to it. In two of the firms involved in the study this extended to relationships between the staff in the shops and the directors of the firms that de-emphasised questions of status. One store manager described this relationship in her firm,

“It is the sort of company where you can ring the director and say I’m not happy about something and you won’t be fobbed off

¹⁴ Interview 11/1/01. A History of Art graduate with six months experience in a city centre branch of a chain retailer.

with a secretary. He's always claimed that a Saturday assistant could do it. I suspect that that is true."¹⁵

Another worker, when asked to reflect on her own relationships to the firm at a directorial level, recalled a meeting with a director in terms which emphasised the importance of personal levels of contact and concern,

"Last year I was helping set up a shop and the director was there and I was feeling ill and he sent me home in a taxi and gave me the money to pay for it and everything...I mean I know he's a director but he knows everyone's names and asks them how they are and talks to them."¹⁶

These types of 'flat' managerial structures encouraged the construction of the shop as a pleasant environment in which to work, peopled by like-minded workers. A manager from a different firm, with similar relationships between shop-floor workers and directors, pointed up the limits of this kind of construction in a commercial environment in which the realities of business (i.e. the autonomy of the cultural field from the economic) inevitably intruded on the social aspects of employment relationships. At times of economic difficulty within chains, these informal relationships might generate resentment at impersonal decisions informed by economic logic.

"I don't think it's a harsh environment – I know friends of mine who work in certain environments and it's tougher and people tend to take no-nonsense and we tend to be a bit more wishy-washy and try to be nice, I think. It's those difficult decisions about closures and things like that – it's not a pleasant thing but in other industries it's more a part of the business than in bookselling."¹⁷

¹⁵ Interview 25/4/01. This respondent was manager of a town centre branch of a chain retailer with six years trade experience.

¹⁶ Interview 10/5/01. An Art and English literature graduate with four years' experience in a town centre branch of a chain retailer.

¹⁷ This respondent was manager of a small city-centre branch of a chain retailer with 13 years' experience.

The lack of visible consideration of the 'realities' of the economic field is also evident in the more organised mechanisms of consultation and control between managers and workers. In the two firms in which the bulk of the study was undertaken two approaches seemed to be evident. In the first there was regular formal contact between members of staff and a regional manager at which they could discuss potential grievances. In the second there were more apparently formal review meetings, at regular intervals, between managers and workers at which grievances could be aired. Both these approaches were largely assessed positively by most of the workers. There was a feeling of contentment with managerial relationships and recognition that the approaches were useful in managing discontent. Such approaches centred upon the individual worker though and dependant upon them for the expression of discontent can be seen as problematic in terms of broader questions of power within the workplace. The confusion of the social relationships with the economic ones helps reinforce the silence surrounding questions of potential conflict and its potential to be collectively expressed. As with other managerial attempts to focus on the subjectivity of the worker, the social aspect of this relationship can become disciplinary, discouraging workers from the expression of dissent within the formal and rhetorically free settings for feed back. One manager described a regular meeting within her shop which attempted to encourage discussion,

"Staff training is a time when people can raise things but they never do which is really irritating because you all look round and say 'has anyone got anything' and you get a sea of blank faces."¹⁸

A worker elaborated upon the reluctance to engage in critical discussion because of the ultimate awareness of the imbalance between the friendliness of the social relationships between workers and managers and the realities of imbalance of power within employment relationships. Discussing her 'review'

¹⁸ Interview 18/1/02. This respondent had eight years of experience in the retail book trade, working for the same chain retailer in various branches.

interviews she implies a space in which the inventedness of the social, personal and 'pleasant' aspects of these relationships is at its most strained.

"In my review they said 'you've had some really interesting ideas and we'd like you to think of more ideas even if we don't take them on board and I just thought 'well I can't actually be arsed because you don't listen'. The review thing is totally false. They say 'is there anything you want to bring up and?' 'Oh no, everything's fine, I'm really happy – just don't give me the sack.'"¹⁹

The *difference* of the retail book trade allows for the employment relationship within the bookshop to be constructed as relatively conflict free. This is a result of its associations with symbolic goods that apparently exist outside of conventionally understood struggles between capital and labour. The recognition of this separation of the work is informed by mutual recognition of value between workers and managers informed by shared or similar relationships to cultural capital. The autonomy of this economy of symbolic goods is strained by the recurring emergence of tensions derived from the imperatives of commercial concerns or the low financial reward on offer to retail workers in general and bookshop workers rich in cultural capital in particular. This can be further demonstrated through evidence of fractured managerial signals about the relative importance of books and the relative importance of the valuable or worthwhile aspects of the trade. This will be examined in the following section in relation to the relationship between rationalisation and commercialisation of the trade and emotional labour in relation to interaction with customers.

¹⁹ Interview 11/1/01. A History of Art graduate with six months experience in a city centre branch of a chain retailer.

Working for the customer; working for the self.

“Recommendations straight from the heart. 36 bookshops – plenty of opinionated booksellers”

Advertisement for *Books etc.* December 2002

As the above discussion of the historical development of the shop has argued, the figure of the customer has been an important, if contested, one in managing retail environments. In the development of shopping as an experience in itself, rather than as a process designed to satisfy material needs, the relationship between sellers and their customers has shifted. Whilst, historically, shopping may have been an activity conducted by rational actors satisfying material needs through processes of choice and exchange, contemporary retail is explicitly concerned with the provision and satisfaction of dreams. Contemporary consumption is not according to Campbell about the materialistic urge to own but the romantic urge to become through experience. The motivation of consumers in this conception is, “the desire to experience in reality the pleasurable dramas which they have already enjoyed in their imagination and each new product is seen as offering the possibility of realising this ambition.” (Campbell 1987:90) This shift in emphasis in consumerism is echoed in the shifting emphasis in the organisation and management of retail workplaces and the shifting consideration of the place and importance of the customer.

In the development of the American department store, a type of shop which Porter Benson argues was historically significant in the development of this ‘consumer culture’, the figure of the salesperson was recognised by managers as a significant barrier to the possible implementation of managerial practices focussing on rational, quantifiable efficiency. This was recognition of the important influence of the social aspect of the service

encounter and of the skill of the retail worker. This interpretation delayed the growth of the self-service store which, it was feared, would undermine the 'cultural message' of the store as a place in which respectable customers were not simply sold things but *served*. The idea of personal service, arguably according to Porter Benson more than the goods which were bought and sold, "suggested to the customer that she was of the class which deserved to be served, that her consumption was a token of her standing in the urban bourgeoisie." (Porter Benson 1988:4) The encouragement of a skilled workforce went largely against the grain of processes of rationalisation envisioned in factory based work proposed by Taylorism and critiqued by Braverman (1974). The essentially social nature of service interaction required consideration of the needs of each customer individually. The drive for commercial success required a high turnover per customer and a high return rate of satisfied customers. These tensions were recognised as "an apples and oranges problem. [Store managers] were trying to combine elements that grew out of fundamentally different systems." (Porter Benson 1988: 127)

The 'retail revolution' in the U.K was characterised by a different conception of the customers as autonomous, rational and in need, not of the reassurance of service, but of the increased possibilities of personal choice which recognised them as self-actualising subjects. This allowed for the work of 'selling' to be effectively passed on to the customer and for retail organisations, as du Gay points out, to focus their attention on meeting customer needs. The result was an apparent de-skilling of service work so that "retailers could therefore recruit labour for occupations demanding little or no specialised knowledge and easily acquired skills." (du Gay 1996: 105) If the act of selling was simply the mechanical act of passing a bar-coded product through a till connected to a computer controlled stock system, the knowledge and skills of salesmanship were less necessary. Paradoxically this has produced what du Gay, Fuller and Smith and Sturdy recognise as

management by customer. The competitive edge in contemporary retail requires workers to get close to the customer and be responsive to his or her needs, re-investing the service encounter with the irrational, personal input of salespeople in the attempt to satisfy the emotional needs of customers. Bowlby recognises this historical movement from the skilled to the de-skilled and back to the skilled as a central narrative in understanding the historical development of shopping. She argues,

“The imagined fall from the personal to the impersonal and the attempted recovery of the personal has happened many times over in many different shopping settings; it never ceases to be one of the principal frames through which shopping is understood.” (Bowlby 2000: 40)

The re-emergence of the personal subjectivity of the sales assistant into the service encounter has also been accompanied by attempts by management to shape this subjectivity, specifically through the development of ‘enterprise’ cultures. These attempts stress the importance of orientation to the customer in the quality of the service interaction. In the retail book trade this process can be seen to be problematic. It is complicated, in particular, by worker relationships with the product that they are selling and by worker attachments to notions of the self, which stress the importance of these symbolic relationships with the products as connected with notions of personal authenticity. Sociological work on emotional labour has emphasised the extent to which managerial attempts to shape the emotional lives of workers have potentially alienating consequences. The culture of the customer that du Gay describes places the emotional life of the worker into the hands of the management culture that is itself at the mercy of the whims of customers. In the retail book trade, though, the focus of emotional labour is not solely on the relationship to the customer but also on the relationship with the things that are sold and the possibility of these things providing a coherent sense of personal identity. As one manager describes

“I don’t understand somebody who works in book-selling who isn’t interested in books or passionate about books. There are other jobs you can do that pay you more and you work less hours so I think you have to have a passion for books”²⁰

This dual emotional focus casts the customer as an ambivalent figure in the bookshop. As Chapter Five explored, the ‘difference’ of the book trade was, in part, premised upon a shared enthusiasm for books between customers and workers which was again informed by a mutual recognition of value in terms of cultural capital. This relationship to customers was also informed by a construction of the work of the bookshop as connected with broader concerns that just profitability. It was inspired by a promotion of reading as an inherently worthwhile activity based upon the personal appreciation, or love of books. One respondent neatly summarised this by suggesting that

“Your relationship to the customer is shaped by the way they feel about books and the way you feel about books”²¹

Chapter Five also implied that this relationship to the customer was not always one of equals. In the promotion of reading as a worthwhile activity workers were making distinctions about certain types of books and between the book buying and non-book buying public. Workers cast themselves, and were also cast by customers, as ‘experts’ in the field of books. This placed them in a position of power over customers. In the context of the position of the retail employee winning ‘the hearts and minds’ of customers, this possible relationship is problematic as it implies the imposition of the tastes of workers onto customers, rather than worker’s reflecting and supplying the desires of customers. This ambivalent relationship with the customer has been a recurring feature of the retail book trade. In his manual for bookselling, former head of the Bookseller’s Association cautions,

²⁰ Interview 25/4/01. Manager of a town centre branch of a chain retailer with six years experience in the retail book trade

²¹ Interview 11/1/01. History of Art graduate working in a city centre branch of a chain retailer with six months experience.

“Do not look too good or talk too wise – advice that is particularly applicable to bookshop assistants. Many people are a little timid of bookshops and bookshop assistants can help such people by being careful not to ride a literary high-horse.” (Joy 1974: 62)

The implication in this advice is that the ‘expertise’ of the bookshop worker might somehow disrupt the ethic of service. In more contemporary accounts though the expertise of the bookshop worker is also drawn upon in the construction of quality and the marketing of the bookshop as a particular kind of space. The knowledgeable bookshop worker is an important image that firms are keen to exploit as part of the process of creating the space of the bookshop. This image draws upon discourses of value associated with symbolic products and adds to the ‘theatrical’ aspect of the contemporary retail experience. At the same time though the majority of service interactions require no reference to this expertise.

In talk with respondents the expertise of bookshop workers was considered an important aspect of the role as it allowed for interaction with customers rich in cultural capital and for the guidance of those customers who were perhaps perceived to lack it. This exchange with a respondent about the satisfaction of relationships with customers demonstrates this

“E: it’s a real pleasure if you can sell something that you think is really good and if you can tell people that it’s really good and they come back and you can sell them something else and that’s really great. And it’s just so enjoyable to sell something that you think is great. We sell a lot of tosh.

DW: So if someone came in and bought something you considered tosh would that be less satisfying?

E: Yes it is a less satisfying sale – if I won the lottery I’d have my own bookshop in it and I’d only have books in it that I

thought were good and if they asked for *Men are From Mars Women are from Venus* I would ask them to leave.”²²

Here we can see that the relationship with the customer is one where the pleasurable experience of work is limited to service interactions involving actors with mutual recognition of value. The quality of the interaction is based upon the recognition of the aesthetic quality of the item being sold, rather than a pleasure in the experience of selling to a particular customer. There is also the implication here that most items sold are tosh and an ironic evocation of an idealised bookshop visited by idealised customers.

Whilst in the context of debates over enterprise culture, a relationship to the product and the customer may be evidence of ‘colonised’ bookselling selves, in the retail book trade the notion of a ‘love of books’ in the context of the relationship to the customer was contentious. Amongst workers and some managers a love of books was central to their aesthetic appreciation of the work but this enthusiasm was not a product of managerial culture, though it was recognised as potentially useful to it. One worker described the importance of ‘authenticity’ to the process of selling books,

“I think you need to genuinely enjoy books and genuinely enjoy being around books. I don’t think you can really fake it, I don’t think that works because people can tell. I think you need to be enthusiastic about what you do.”²³

Whilst talk like this clearly resonates with the notion of a managed culture in which workers’ demeanours and goals are engineered to match with those of the employer, in talk with bookshop managers the possibility of over-identification with books was also recognised. One manager described the possible tensions in finding ideal workers,

²² Interview 11/5/01/. An English and philosophy graduate with eleven years trade experience.

²³ Interview 17/4/01. An English graduate with four and a half years experience working for the same branch of a chain retailer.

“Really what I don’t want is people who enjoy reading – what I want is people who understand the trade or the retail environment. It’s trying to get beyond thinking of it as a cardigan wearing whispering scenario and think of it as a retail institution.”²⁴

Here, the sense is that, whilst enthusiasm is useful, over-association with some of the broader resonances of books is problematic. As chapter four outlined, these symbolic meanings implicate books and reading as engaged in discourses which are ambivalent to notions such as commercial success. Books and reading as the ‘cardigan wearing, whispering scenario’ are activities which symbolically separate themselves from processes of commodity exchange even as they are engaged in them. Whilst bookshop workers might love books, chain retailers require them to translate this enthusiasm into a more commercially useful love of *selling* books. The difficulty in perpetuating this orientation amongst bookshop workers stems, in part, from orientations to the product derived from other sources. Bookselling firms do not hold a monopoly over the generation of meaning over the products that they sell. Instead books can be seen to exist as symbols of a particular set of cultural values and, as such, important resources in the construction of an authentic self. Amongst workers this was contrasted with work in other retail environments which were, inevitably inauthentic. One manager described how,

“Most of the time as a bookseller you are selling a product that you think is worth it or something you believe in – it’s not like selling mops or reams of paper or something you don’t care about. Most people who come and work in a bookshop sort of care about what they are selling”²⁵

²⁴ This respondent was manager of a small city centre branch of a chain retailer with 13 years trade experience.

²⁵ Interview 18/4/01. Manager of a small town centre branch with five years trade experience.

The idea of emotional attachment to the product was considered to be unique and genuine in the booktrade, whereas, in other sorts of trades, the association between product knowledge and the enthusiasm of sales people was necessarily invented.

“If I go into Dixon’s and the salesman says ‘cor, this bloody Hoover’s fantastic, I love it’ – it just doesn’t work does it? That’s a utilitarian product. I think it must be the artiness of books, the personal experience of them that you are getting across.”²⁶

Whilst workers in corporate retail environments are encouraged to think of their personal development as entwined with that of the organisation, the selective interpretation of the word ‘culture’ in managerial discourse denies the extent to which sources of the self are sought and provided elsewhere. In bookshop work orientation to the product and the expression of genuine enthusiasm did not merely enable their role as sales assistants, it insulated them from the mundane realities of service work and the potential inauthenticities of repeatedly affected service encounters. In relation to a feeling for books one worker commented that

“some of them feel like weights- just a load of bricks that you could be dealing with and when you’re putting them on the shelves you can get to hate them. But it’s important to have an emotional response to books, just for yourself”²⁷

Workers had a tendency to articulate their relationship with books and hence their relationship with their work in terms that problematised the simple material or commodity status of books and the interaction with customers as simplistic market exchange. This relationship was a crucial source of the added value of the service interaction which was used in the construction of the bookshop as a particular type of retail experience in the competitive retail

²⁶ Interview 3/5/01. This respondent was manager of a large town centre branch with twenty years’ experience in the trade with various retailers.

²⁷ Interview 11/1/01. A History of Art graduate with six months’ experience of work in a city centre branch.

market. Paradoxically though it also limited the complete development of an 'enterprise culture' as workers' associations with the products and their symbolic resonance necessarily distances them from complete immersion in the commercial culture of an organisation.

In effect the emotional attachment, derived from romantic constructions of books places bookshop work in the context of Bourdieu's anti-economic logic in which pursuit of commercial success in the symbolic economy is itself evidence of inauthenticity. In place of a focus on this kind of success is a more ephemeral belief in the value of the work that they are doing, based upon a construction of good books and the desirability of promoting them. Thus selling books, which resonate with these values of disinterestedness by virtue of their relative obscurity or their acquisition of symbolic value, becomes a more satisfying experience than selling books that do not.

A mutual recognition of symbolic value, of the importance of the product in terms of the accumulation of cultural capital and the recognition of the bookshop worker and customers as particular types of people all problematise the assumptions of the colonised self and the inauthentic service encounter. The self here might be colonised, but by cultural constructions of the book as an artefact of 'cultural' worth or as a product that is not a product in the sense of other sectors of the retail industry. The roots of this construction are harder to trace than those found in managerial discourse of enterprise cultures but they suggest not the narcissistic self proposed by Casey (1995) or Ezzy (2001) following Lasch (1979) nor the consuming, enterprising self proposed by du Gay (1996) but a romantic self, in part understood as aloof or consciously separate from the workings of the market. The construction of the self as strongly informed by values derived away from the workplace and the possibility of this self being realised or actualised in the workplace through interaction with like-minded customers also makes the idea of workers as alienated from their true emotional selves

problematic. Whilst such inauthentic interactions in other types of service work may well put the psychic health of the worker at risk (Erickson 1995) in the retail book trade interactions where assistants *mean* it make up for, or insulate them from, interactions where they do not.

In the retail book trade, then, one can see the possibility that the commercial success of the organisation is in the hands of a potentially untrustworthy 'simulacrum' of loyalty on behalf of the workers prioritising authentic interactions derived from their personal tastes and enthusiasms. It may be that in other types of retail, such as those described by du Gay (1996), the promotion of the enterprising self is a collusion between the drive for self-fulfilment considered typical of the consuming self and the processes of self-discipline and self-management required of service workplaces. In the retail book trade, though, there is evidence of the survival, within the drive to self-fulfilment, of romantic imperatives that necessarily position this fulfilment as outside of the everyday and certainly outside the workings of the market. The drive for self-fulfilment and the requirements for self-discipline are distinct and even antagonistic. The ontological security of the self does not depend upon the managerially defined values of the workplace and is not produced by them.

The ways in which the booktrade is a typical retailer in terms of the development of contemporary retail probably far outweigh its differences, however much these differences inform the experience of bookshop work. Key similarities, as outlined in this chapter, include the lack of financial reward, high turnover of staff and management initiatives which focus upon the subjectivity of the worker. It is, however, not possible to generalise from these characteristics to an inherently unstable, shallow, narcissistic, diminished or even enterprising 'self'. The shop workers and managers I spoke to in this study were keenly aware of the limited possibilities of a sustainable self through a bookshop work career. The apparent inevitability of

leaving the trade, for some workers, is balanced by the recognition of the work as valuable, enjoyable or the least alienating or inauthentic of possible career options. Workers are not unaware of the possible iniquities of their workplace, or simplistically colonised by an organisation's commercial goals. Rather they are prepared to play along with the performance of their role as a means of expressing an externally derived sense of 'people like them'. This may, of course, fit the organisational goals but this kind of construction of the self necessarily de-limits the possibility of the kind of total employee dedication to the goals of the commercial organisation which we might expect from generalising the model of the enterprising self. It is the romantic discourse associated with books, rather than the inefficient and inconsistent managerial perspectives on bookselling as a commercial operation to be governed through the techniques of other service industries, that is the greater influence in shaping the bookselling self.

Conclusion

This thesis began with a critical examination of contemporary narratives of the self in the apparently discrete contexts of work and consumption. It used the specific historical and empirical context of the retail book trade as a means of examining these narratives, particularly as they related to questions of the self in work and the place of cultural capital in informing the experience of work in a culture industry. The aim of this approach was neither to dismiss nor confirm the validity of these useful narratives. Instead, it was to use them, as Armstrong argues they should be used (Armstrong 2001), as testable hypotheses rather than simple, unproblematic eyes to the heart of contemporary experience. The self, Chapters One and Two argued, is central to our understanding of both the experience of work and the experience of consumption. Indeed, it can be seen as the thing upon which both these key organising institutions of late-modernity are premised.

In the workplace, for example, subjectivity becomes a primary focus of managerial initiatives designed to improve efficiency. Workers in the service and retail industry are surrounded by discourses of self-fulfilment and self-development which resonate strongly with managerial imperatives. As such the late modern self might be reflexive but might also be colonised and diminished, somehow inauthentic. Similarly the consuming self is engaged in a journey of self-fulfilment through the experience and exchange of symbolic goods. We are free, though the quality of this freedom is contested, to construct our selves through the manipulation of the world of things, rather than being simplistically manipulated by our position in the processes of production of things. What the experience of the retail book trade demonstrates is that these narratives can be complicated when we think of work as consumption and of consumption as work. Whilst both workers and managers (both at work and in consuming) might talk about the self in terms of development and fulfilment it does not necessarily follow, as the previous chapter has argued, that the two groups conceptualise the self in the same way.

The use of the retail book trade as a specific empirical setting has helped in the critical examination of these narratives in a number of ways. Retail itself is clearly an important space, where processes of production (work) and consumption are spatially and temporally linked. Du Gay's work has been a particularly useful resource in illuminating the hybridity of service employment and pointing out, through the notion of enterprise culture the contested experience of managerial initiatives. Crucially though, books have also been used in this thesis as exemplars of the kind of symbolic commodity which the contemporary consuming self apparently relies on. Campbell outlines the extent to which the novel was the prototype for the symbolic goods of the contemporary market place, allowing for the investment of feeling and the shaping of the self. An important question which a focus on the retail book

trade allows is how do workers feel about their work, and more particularly, how do they feel about the things that they work with. 'Feeling', in accounts of contemporary service employment again points towards processes of manipulation. Accounts of emotional labour at work emphasise the inauthenticity of the service interaction and the embodiment of alienating employment relationships. The experience of art and more specifically the experience of books and reading have, by contrast, been historically associated with processes of apparently *authentic* self-production. Chapters Four and Five examined the roots of these feelings by critically assessing both representations of books and reading and attitudes to books and reading within the publishing and retail trades. Chapter Four used the figure of the author as an early exemplar of the self-created self and argued that the bookshop had historically been constructed as a space of refuge from the excesses of modernity and from the late-modern high street. Chapter five developed this through an examination of some historical accounts of power struggles associated with reading and brought these up to date by critically examining some bookshop worker accounts of 'feelings' for these products.

Arguably all retail workers are engaged in a paradoxical process. In a consumer society their work operates to facilitate the self-formation of their customers. They place themselves, or are placed, in the power relationships of the workplace as everyone else is enjoying the reflexive, liberating fun of consumption. In the retail book trade, the historical resonances of books and reading add an extra layer to this process. Books exist as a different kind of commodity – indeed one that it is possible to think of as not a commodity at all. As such the place of books within a hierarchy of value of other objects, particularly other objects which are bought and sold, makes for distinct relationships between consumers of books and the objects of their consumption and, crucially, for those engaged in the production and distribution of books.

Bookshop workers are attracted into the trade, like Bourdieu's proletaroid intelligentsia, for the symbolic resonance of books and their association with notions of personal development askance from other aspects of modernity connected with narratives of authenticity. The experience of the trade, though, necessarily produces tensions as the possibility of the romantic prestige of bookshop work is minimised by the mundane experiences of retail. Chapters Six and Seven have examined these tensions by focussing on the book trade more generally as a sphere of production. The ways in which the book trade has discursively constructed itself as 'different' from other less obviously symbolic (less obviously 'authentic'?) types of commerce and industry were examined. The experience of change in the book industry, the influence of technology and, in particular, the possibility of the separation of the literary field from the economic all compromised this conception of difference. However, this narrative was a powerful resource in constructing occupational identities. These chapters contribute to recent sociological accounts of the cultural nature of the economy. Contemporary sociological accounts of the 'culturalness' of the economy enrich our understanding of economic life. Accounts drawn from Becker and more concretely from Bourdieu emphasise the 'economic' underpinning of the cultural field and are helpful in reminding us that cultural products are embedded in particular processes of production.

At the heart of these tensions is romanticism, the final reason why books and the book trade provide a useful empirical setting for questioning contemporary narratives of the self. Critical sociological accounts of the self at work, and the self in interactive service work in particular, point to the inauthenticity inevitable in the processes of interaction. Workers are required to exhibit their enthusiasm and their ability to do this is the essence of competitive advantage of retail firms. Questions of self-fulfilment and development then become exclusively the domain of managers as specialists in the self. This thesis asserts the need to re-integrate conceptualisations of the self, drawn from romanticism into these debates. Romanticism, as Campbell argues in

the context of the processes of consumption, is an important historical period in the development of the historical notion of the self that is inspired precisely by a separation of the individual from the mundane compromises of day to day life under capitalism and from engagement with the commercial market place in particular. Whilst post-structuralist accounts of the self at work have been keen to re-emphasise the 'disciplinary' aspect of the self, they have been less able to see the potential liberating affect of self assertion that romanticism implies. In the retail book trade asserting one's personal enthusiasm is not simply a product of managerial imperative but an act of self-preservation – an attempt to exhibit the characteristics of personal authenticity in a situation which almost necessarily militates against it. In the broader context this is the need to offer oneself up to potentially alienating employment relationships out of the need to satisfy material needs. In the specific context of the book-trade this is experiencing the potential iniquities and compromises of interactive service work

The use of romanticism is not, however, meant to romanticise. The appreciation of books by workers and their attempts to craft a type of self that does not necessarily correspond to the entrepreneurial self so prevalent in retail settings may be experienced by them as an act of preservation or even resistance. At the very least it challenges the inevitability of colonisation by managerial discourse. Their ability to do this, however, is itself a reflection of their own levels of cultural capital. A romantic conception of the self is an important factor in worker's abilities to distance themselves from disciplinary modes of self-development that resonate with the goals of organisations. This thesis also, however, stresses the extent to which the ability to appreciate culture 'romantically', and to translate this appreciation into the kinds of symbolic capital necessary for assertions of the self, is itself embedded in relationships of cultural production, as the high levels of educational achievement amongst bookshop workers indicates. Bookshop workers are rich in cultural capital and draw upon these resources, both in aesthetically

judging their own work as qualitatively different from other types of retail work, and in constructing their relationships with customers as premised either on mutual recognition of value or on their own expertise and authority. These aesthetic judgements are a reflection and expression of power. Narratives of change in the book-trade from those working in the industry, such as the end of the Net Book Agreement and the rise of the corporate publisher and bookshop, can be interpreted as a reluctant modernity that implies romantic critique of prevailing patterns of economic organisation. What they also represent is a challenge to the possibility of cultural authority amongst workers that compromises the conception of their work and by extension themselves as different.

Appendix

Company Profiles

The bulk of the interviews took place within two companies. Company A was the most recently established chain, having started trading in the late eighties with branches on the south-coast. Initially expanding around market towns of England it had recently begun establishing larger stores within city-centres and had taken over a rival chain to become a major force in UK bookselling with a particular commitment to notions of autonomy and independence amongst its staff. At the time of the interviews it employed close to 2,000 staff in over a hundred branches across the UK. Company B was, by contrast, a well-established company with over a hundred years of bookselling experience. At the time of the interviews it had eighty branches of varying sizes, predominantly specialising in academic sites, though with some large high street stores in regional centres. One interview was held with a former employee of Company B who had recently begun work at a third company. Company C was an American based company who had begun to establish a presence in the UK market in the past decade, largely in city centres or newly developed out-of-town retail malls. It had 36 stores across the UK and was considered a relatively small but significant player in the broader book retail market, largely because of its position within a larger global firm with 1,200 stores and 36,000 employees worldwide. Finally one telephone interview and one e-mail exchange was undertaken with employees of a fourth company. Company D was the largest UK chain retailer with over 200 stores. Initially established as an independent company in the early eighties it was now part of a broader retail conglomerate and as such considered a powerful and influential force in shaping both the retail trade and the broader publishing industry

Appendix

Respondent Table

Respondent	Gender	Experience/Length of Service	Firm	Date of Interview	Educational background/qualifications.	Position & Company
1	M	4 years position; 20 years trade	A	12/4/01	Graphic design graduate	Manager
2	M	4 years, 6 months trade	A	17/4/01	English Graduate	Worker
3	F	4 years trade	A	10/5/01	Art & English Lit Graduate	Worker
4	F	4 years position; 13 years trade	B	6/12/01	Psychology graduate	Manager
5	F	1 year position; 11 years trade	A	11/4/01	English & Philosophy Graduate	Assistant Manager
6	M	18 months position; 10 years trade	B	4/12/00	Non-graduate	Internet site manager (former branch manager)
7	M	4 years position; 20 years trade	A	3/5/01	English graduate	Manager
8	F	1 year position; 9 years trade	B	11/6/01	History & Politics graduate	Former Assistant Manager (recently made redundant)
9	F	2 years trade	A	12/4/01	Library & Information Studies graduate	Worker
10	F	4 years trade	A	11/4/01	Library & information studies graduate	Manager
11	F	4 years in position; 13 years trade	A	25/4/01	Library Studies	Manager
12	F	5 years trade	A	18/4/01	English & European Studies graduate	Manager
13	F	6 months trade	B	11/01/01	History of Art graduate	Worker
14	M	3 years position; 4 years trade	A	10/5/01	Film & Literature graduate	Manager
15	F	4 months position; 3 years trade	C	15/01/02	English & American Literature; Post-graduate qualification	Assistant Manager
16	F	5 years trade	A	18/4/01	Library Studies	Worker
17	F	New position; 30+ years trade	N/A	22/1/02	Apprenticeship (Europe)	Training Consultant (former manager)

18	F	1 year position; 8 years trade	B	18/01/01	Non-graduate (degree not completed)	Assistant Manager
19	F	5 years position; 8 years trade	A	17/4/01	Graduate (not specified)	Manager
20	F	7 months trade	A	3/5/01	Non-graduate; Child care qualifications	Worker
21	F	2 months trade	B	6/12/01	European Studies; Post graduate qualification	Worker
22	F	1 Year trade	B	16/11/01	Fine Art; Post graduate qualification	Worker
23	F	7 years trade	D	7/1/02 (e-mail exchange)	Library Studies	Worker
24	F	15 years trade; 2 years position	A	14/2/01	Graduate – subject not specified	Director (Personnel/Human Resources)
25	F	5 years trade	B	20/11/00	Graduate – subject not specified	Director (Personnel/Human Resources)
26	F	3 years position	B	15/6/02	Non-graduate; Unrelated vocational qualification.	Worker
27	M	8 years trade; 5 years position	N/A	22/4/02	English graduate	Manager (Independent bookshop)
28	F	20 years trade	N/A	23/4/02	English graduate	Manager (Independent bookshop)
29	M	3 years trade; 1 year position	B	28/11/01	Fashion and design graduate	Assistant manager
30	M	18 years trade	D	9/1/02 (Telephone interview)	English graduate	Former Manager

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